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**STREET VENDING IN GUANGZHOU:  
AN URBAN TRADITION AND ITS  
MODERN FATE**

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Thesis submitted for the qualification of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Geography,  
Durham University

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# **Abstract**

In recent decades, Chinese government's eviction of vendors and its resultant frequent conflicts have drawn much attention of the society. This thesis is concerned with this ongoing urban politics, specifically with regard to how the anti-vending ideologies took shape in history, and how it is practiced as an exclusionary geography today.

Tracing into historical archives, the thesis finds that street vending was a long-standing urban tradition in the imperial China which only started to be marginalised and evicted since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In sight of the remarkable parallels between the eviction today and a century ago, the thesis views the present street vending politics not as a newborn incident but with reference to its earlier histories. Through delineating the historical continuities between the early modern and the contemporary era, the thesis develops an account of the historical formation of anti-vending ideologies.

Nonetheless, China's tradition of street vending is so deep that it lasts well into the contemporary urban life despite government's crackdown. Through a fieldwork case in Guangzhou, the thesis explores how the modern marginalisation is experienced by vendors in everyday life and how they actively adjust themselves to carve out living space in the fissures of the urban administration and economy system. It finds that the majority of vendors do not fully settle in the city, but rather live a life that is translocally maintained between their home villages and the city; it further proposes to see street vending as a 'translocal urbanism' that transplants the traditional occupation into modern environment and reshapes China's urban landscape.

Through bridging the history and the present, the thesis tries to move beyond the influential 'revanchist urbanism' approach which considers the eviction of street

vending as a neoliberal strategy of local development, and offers a historically-informed understanding that is more complete and more situated in China's specific context.



# Acknowledgements

The four years of doctoral study in Durham, with all its struggles and joy, is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me. Sometimes I doubted whether I could even make it to the end, and sometimes it feels like the PhD stage is never-ending, and my life will stay the same forever: meeting supervisors, hanging out with friends, taking walks along River Wear ... Now, all these have come to an end.

I would like to hereby express my heartfelt thanks to my supervisors, Mike Crang and Chris Harker, for all the helps they gave me and their kindness in leading me step by step through the whole process. I also want to thank my examiners, Colin McFarlane and Peter Mackie, for their insightful suggestions which greatly improved my thesis.

I am also grateful to my parents who, although half a world away, kept worrying and supporting me. A circle of friends has been my source of joy throughout these years. Thanks to them, my life in UK has been colourful. And among all these friends, I met the special one with whom I wish to start the next chapter of my life.

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged. No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other learning institutes.



## **Statement of copyright**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Guangzhou rains a lot in summer. It was just another rainy night in 2013, when I was hanging out in Teemall, a popular shopping mall in Guangzhou, China. As I walked out the south entrance, I saw a crowd gathering at the gateway and heard shouts of a woman. Pushing my way through the crowd, I saw what was happening: several security guards from the shopping mall were trying to drive away a female street vendor from the gateway. The vendor, a middle-aged woman, was drenched through with rain and stubbornly sitting on the ground, refused to leave. Beside her were two baskets of cherries that she was selling. There were some cherries scattered on the ground, probably dropped out because of her struggle with security guards. Later I was told by an onlooker: ‘she just wanted to come in to shelter from the rain, but the guys drove her out because this place belongs to Teemall and they forbid peddling here.’

Then I heard her shouting to the guards again: ‘You don’t let me to stay here? Then I’m just staying here. What noble place is it?’ At the same time, she stood up and carried the baskets closer to the gate. The guards — all burly men in suits — approached her right away, shouted back and surrounded her closely to stop her from moving further. I took out my phone to take photo of this scene, but a guard immediately walked to me, blocked the camera with his hand and said: ‘Don’t shoot! Get out of here!’ I was scared at the time and dared not to resist. Soon, more guards came and blocked the vision, and I was eventually unable to shoot a photo of the woman. At last, a group of uniformed chengguan officers<sup>1</sup> arrived and put an end to the situation. The last scene I saw was the woman standing up, carrying her shoulder pole and walked slowly into the rainy night. Luckily the rain had let up.

For city dwellers in China, such conflicts between security guards or chengguan officers and street vendors are a common sight. Unlike cities like New York which issues licenses to street vendors, Chinese street vendors are mostly unlicensed. Although there were regulations about street vending license, their actual implementation is limited, because obtaining a licence requires the vendor to pay an amount of management fee

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to officers of The Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau (hereinafter referred to as *Chengguan* Bureau, its Chinese name), who are in charge of driving away street vendors. See detailed discussion in 5.4.1.

and only sell wares in allocated places which are normally in peripheral areas. Over the years, urban governments nationwide have been trying to get rid of these unlicensed, unregulated street vendors, sometimes strictly, sometime loosely. On the way home from workplaces, at tourist attractions, or in shopping areas, one can see vendors being chased by chengguan officers from time to time, like a cat-and-mouse game. Such scenes are like episodic dramas in the city streets: vendors shouting, running, carrying their poles or pushing trolleys, with the passing crowds watching and frowning. When you buy from vendors, you can see the wariness in their eyes. Whatever they are doing, they constantly keep an eye on the potential threats from chengguan officers.

From time to time I recalled that scene, the scene that I failed to shoot, the middle-aged woman, the rain, and the intimidating faces of security guards. And I thought to myself: why do the shopping mall and the government forbid street vending? When did the tradition of street vending start? Where do the vendors come from, and where do they live? The more I thought about it, the more I found it involved with a complex web of cultural, political and social logics. One thing led to another, I finally chose street vending as the topic of my PhD research. I chose it because it brings together some of the most significant aspects of China's transitional society: the mismatch between old traditions and modern life, the huge cultural difference between urban and rural areas, the enormous troop of migrant workers living in the city yet not belonging to city, the beautifying and capitalising will of urban government, and its pervasive surveillance and control over every corner of the society. The ongoing urban politics of street vending is a prism through which we can look at the multiple social dynamics in contemporary Chinese society.

Moreover, street vending brings together China's past and present. As a means for the commoners to earn a livelihood, street vending used to be a long-standing urban tradition and performed important roles in imperial Chinese city culture, so important that it is thought to represent 'the life, habits and psychology of the Chinese people' (Constant, 1935, p. iii). Since the early modern era<sup>2</sup>, however, it was marginalised and stigmatised as a public nuisance that leads to disorder, dirtiness and other urban problems. As a remnant handed down from traditional urban life, street vending is widely deemed as 'part of the premodern traditional economic order' (Cross & Morales,

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<sup>2</sup> This thesis defines Chinese modern history as the period since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when China was increasingly impacted by the West and started modernisation. 'Early modern' refers to the period from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1949, succeeded by the Socialist period.



2007, p. 21) and is often found inappropriate in modern urban life. Specifically, street vending is inappropriate in many ways: it does not conform to modern concept of urban sanitation and city appearance; it disturbs public order, especially the traffic order in car-oriented modern cities; it is not included in the urban formal sector and the national tax system. As vendors in Chinese cities are mostly from the rural areas and not accustomed to the various urban modern orders, they have brought the tension between the rural and the urban, the traditional and the modern into contemporary urbanism through operating the ‘premodern’<sup>3</sup> business in the city streets. For this reason, the previous urban tradition becomes ‘menace’ and ‘eyesore’ to the contemporary government. Starting from the 1990s, Chinese urban governments began to ban street vending by setting up Chengguan Bureaus in every city and sending chengguan officers to rid vendors of city streets. The severe and sometimes heavy-handed crackdowns from chengguan officers often hit the headlines in domestic and international media (Jacobs, 2013; Williams, 2016).

Despite being officially banned, however, the street vending economy still existed and sometimes thrived in Chinese cities. It has become a considerable component of China’s urban informal economy<sup>4</sup> and contributed significantly to its rapid urbanisation. It provides a huge number of unskilled rural-urban migrants who failed to find formal jobs with a means of livelihood to live in the city and feed their rural families. In the meantime, it also helps cities to absorb millions of rural surplus labours and boosts the vitality of urban economy and urban life. By selling various food, daily necessities and other merchandise at competitive price and in convenient places, street vending has gained wide popularity among urban residents. Shopping from the street has become a collective custom in the post-reform<sup>5</sup> Chinese urban life. Recently, to keep up with the digital era, many vendors have started to accept mobile payment through smartphone. The scene of vendors selling in the street with passers-by gathering around is commonplace for most Chinese cities, so visible that has even reshaped the urban landscape in a degree.

Street vending brings together multiple public issues. Chengguan’s eviction of them is an everyday representation of state’s intervention of social life. Chengguan officers’

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<sup>3</sup> The manifold meaning of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional/premodern’ here is discussed in 7.1.

<sup>4</sup> There are no official statistics on the overall scale of street vendors in mainland China due to their unregistered and mobile features. Rough estimate ranges from 25 million (B. He, 2008) to 30 million (Yuan & Xin, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Refers to the economic reform since 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping.

treatment of vendors affects the public opinion of the Party and the State. The debate of whether street vending should be allowed becomes a starting point of discussing urban aesthetics and the livelihood of migrant workers. What makes street vendors the focus of the society is their publicness. According to official statistics, there were around 270 million rural-urban migrant workers in Chinese cities by 2015<sup>6</sup>, but the majority of them live in a parallel world from local residents who hold urban hukou<sup>7</sup> and lack the integration into urban society, because they are mostly accommodated in dormitories on factory grounds, temporary housing on construction sites or rented house in urban villages<sup>8</sup> (Bork-Hüffer, & Etzold et al., 2016). However, street vendors, as a member of the army of migrant workers, have a unique close relation with urban space that is inherently demanded by their occupation. In order to gain access to clients, they are inclined to trade in the busy urban areas and approach the flow of people as much as possible. As the accessibility to public spaces is associated directly with vendors' income, urban public spaces become a crucial economic asset for them, and the politics of street vending is essentially a spatial battle between vendors and the government. Such feature gives vendors an inherent public characteristic: they need to appropriate public space, which gives them a spatial publicness; they confront directly with street-level state power, which gives them a political publicness; they interact with urban dwellers, which gives them a social publicness. Bearing this threefold publicness, the spatial practice of street vending is inevitably a public engagement that draws the focus of the society, although it is not intended by vendors themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201504/t20150429\\_797821.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201504/t20150429_797821.html)

<sup>7</sup> Hukou is the Chinese household registration system. Urban and rural population are registered differently and entitled with different public resources (see 5.2).

<sup>8</sup> Urban villages, or *chengzhongcun*, are former suburban villages that have been encircled by urban sprawl but not yet transferred to formal urban governance. They are commonly turned into rental accommodations of poor living condition and low rent, and usually inhabited by low-income groups (see 6.5.1).

## **Chapter 2**

# **Conceptualising the politics of street vending**

### **2.1 Literature review**

Before building my own theorisation, it is necessary to look back at what the academia have achieved in this field. In this section, we first review studies on street vending in general, then focus on four approaches of street vending studies, respectively: government regulation, urban space, revanchist urbanism, and informal sector. Sorting through the existing knowledge enables me to decide where should I situate my own research.

#### **2.1.1 Street vending in general**

Literature on street vending mostly comes from disciplines such as public administration, economics, geography, urban planning and sociology. Street vending can be briefly defined as ‘the retail or wholesale trading of goods and services in streets and other related public axes such as alleyways, avenues and boulevards’ (Bromley, 2000, p. 1). Plentiful research has indicated street vendors’ contribution to the vitality of streetscape and the provision of urban economy and service, while negative effects such as littering, traffic congestion, food safety, tax evasion and unfair competition with formal economies are also identified (see Bhowmik, 2012; Cross & Morales, 2007; Graaff & Ha, 2015). Although street vending exists in most countries, it is most prosperous in the urban areas of developing countries, usually as a survival strategy for excessive migrants from rural areas to earn subsistence income. The case in Guangzhou, China (see Chapter 6) is a typical example.

Trading in the streets is not easy. Despite the efforts of preparing goods and attracting customers, street vendors often face harassment from local police or officials. In view of the aforementioned negative effects, many countries have issued laws and ordinances to regulate street vending activity. Conflicts between the government and the vendors are recorded by research around the world. In many cases, vendors are organised into associations so as to perform effective resistance and petition the government for better treatment (India: Anjaria, 2006; Etzold, 2013; Mexico: Pena, 2000; Crossa, 2009; Peru: Bromley and Mackie, 2009; Steel, 2012; Indonesia: Gibbings, 2013). But in China, where NGOs and civil associations are strictly restricted, vendors mostly do business in an individualised way. Instead of establishing cooperative relation with urban colleagues,

they tend to seek help from their rural families. Even for those who have been living in cities for decades, their rural linkage maintains strong. Such urban-rural connection in vendors' migration is examined in 6.5.

### **2.1.2 Government regulation on street vending**

In the eyes of government, street vending is often seen as a form of urban disorder because it disrupts traffic order, impedes traffic flows and generates garbage on the street. As a result, urban governments around the world have been attempting to implement effective regulation on vendors. Pena (2000) helpfully categorises the various regulation practices into four models: the laissez-faire model, government regulatory model, mafia regulatory model and the socio-institutional model, and delineated a spectrum that connects the four models with increasing regulative degree. Bromley (2000) notes that the official vending policies are often a complex coexistence of persecution, regulation, tolerance and promotion, fluctuating in different periods and areas. Additionally, drawing upon Michael Lipsky's concept of 'street bureaucracy' (Lipsky, 2010), he indicates that there exists an inevitable wide gulf in the administration of street vendors between the broad aims and directives from above and the actual bottom-level implementation, because the latter 'requires interactions between dozens of local officials and literally thousands of vendors, with enormous potential for misunderstandings, avoidance and deception'.

Although governments made efforts to regulate or eliminate street vendors, the outcomes are not ideal in most cases. Research has documented various avoidance strategies of vendors to cope with the harassment of local police or chengguan, which makes up an everyday form of silent resistance. Their persistent attempts to return to the street, together with the emerging public opinion that sympathises the poor and calls for tolerance, have led to ambivalent attitudes of some government. This will be elaborated in the following discussion about 'post revanchism'.

### **2.1.3 Street vending and urban space**

A prominent character of street vending is their appropriation of urban public space. Mitchell Duneier (2000) explores in detail the role of street vendors in the functioning of public space in New York, USA, and finds the world of these inconspicuous figures is actually full of norms and self-regulation. He then argues that vendors can produce safe and organically organised public spaces as well as enhance the quality of neighbourhood life. Similarly, Anjaria (2006) finds that Indian hawkers have their own attitude of the how space

should be used and vigorously regulate themselves' use of space. He also notes that hawkers perform a role of what Jane Jacobs calls 'eyes on the street', that is, watching over public space and detecting potential danger. Research has also illustrated how spaces are contested and appropriated by vendors from the hand of municipalities and corporations to carve out living space (Bhowmik, 2003; Crossa, 2009; Hansen, 2004; Hunt, 2009). These politics of street vending comprise part of the various bottom-up 'insurgent spaces' across the world through which urban dwellers manage to challenge the officially defined use of public space and create alternative urban landscapes (Hou, 2010). In response to the lamentation of the disappearing public space in academia, Hou finds that space users are constantly creating public spaces through their flexible guerrilla tactics.

To analyse the spatial pattern of street vendors' routinised temporal-spatial pattern of working, living and resistance against chengguan's harassment, Chapter 6 utilises a series of concepts from Giddens' spatial-temporal social theory, especially the concepts of 'regionalisation' ('the zoning of time-space in relation to routinized social practices'), 'boundary', 'front region and back region', 'centre and periphery' (Giddens, 1985, p. 277; 1986, p. 119). As a part of the spatial turn of social theory, Giddens' theorising of time-space contributes to social sciences by binding temporal and spatial analyses together and recognising time and space as not merely backdrops but active factors that shape and are shaped by social life. It could be used to analyse different scales of social reality, from international geography to indoor micro space, from long time span to daily routines. This thesis is a micro-scale application of the framework. The official temporal-spatial vending regulation is mapped, as well as vendors' everyday resistant tactics against chengguan officers. Broader temporal-spatial patterns are also revealed, such as vendors' daily schedule and their commute paths, in order to show their relation with the city. Such temporal-spatial lens helps to represent how time, space and people are intertwined and unable to be separated when studying the life of street vendors: not only government's law enforcement relies on temporal and spatial strategies, vendors' working and living are also deeply embedded in urban temporality and spatiality. It should also be noted that, as Giddens sees social reality as constantly being produced and reproduced through a process of 'structuration', spatial and temporal regionalisation is also constantly in a dynamic process; the routinised practices and rules are possible to be challenged, negotiated and re-routinised by different agents. This is vividly exemplified by many cases in Chapter 6.

#### 2.1.4 Revanchist urbanism

Conceptualising the reason of governments' exclusionary vending policies, most scholars attribute it to the rise of neo-liberalism since the 1980s. David Harvey (1989) accurately identified the role shift of urban governments from a 'managerialist' one to an 'entrepreneurialist' one, that is, from local providers of public welfare to entrepreneurs competing for capital investments to foster local economic growth. As urban space became the site of capital accumulation, cities were re-imagined as a tool for attracting investment rather than a place for living. In order to create attractive urban landscape, urban governments started to criminalise and displace certain marginal groups who did not conform to the new spatial imagination, in the name of urban redevelopment or revitalisation. Neil Smith (1996) dubbed this turn as 'revanchist city' to stress municipal government's revengeful spatial exclusion against marginal groups such as the homeless, squatters, ethnic minorities, sex workers, homosexuals and street traders in order to reinstate the bourgeois city image and reclaim the city centre. Revanchist city is part and parcel of today's global neoliberalism and the product of the neoliberal anti-welfare ideology. Although Smith's finding was initially based on the case of New York City, he also claims that the New York model could become a 'template for a global, postliberal revanchism that may exact revenge against different social groups in different places, doing so with differing intensities and taking quite different forms' (Smith, 2001, p. 73). Led by local politicians, investors and land developers, similar revanchist manifestations have been witnessed in different urban contexts across the world, 'travelling' from the North to the South (northern America: DeVerteuil, 2006; Niedt, 2006; Slater, 2004; UK: Atkinson, 2003; MacLeod, 2002; Continental Europe: Aalbers, 2011; Colomb, 2007; Uitermark and Duyvendak, 2008; Latin America: Swanson, 2007; Asia: Whitehead and Moore, 2007; Jou et al., 2016). All these cases tell a similar story: the undesirables are removed because local governments intend to transform downtown spaces into consumer-friendly, investment-friendly spaces.

Does China have revanchist cities? Atkinson's (2003, p. 1833) framework of four analytical strands of revanchist city provides us a helpful yardstick:

- 1) *a mode of governance* that seeks to control public space and to dictate recognised or approved uses for such space;
- 2) *a set of programmes* designed to secure public space through coercive urban administration;

- 3) *a prophetic and dystopian image* that represents the malaise and distress of public spaces and calls for vengeful policies;
- 4) *a reference to economic objectives* seen in the connection between urban economic development and the need to secure capital investment by beautifying and securing city spaces in order to market the quality of living in such locations.

China's exclusions of street vendors are attributed to the neoliberal logic of local governments (Gaubatz, 2008; Solinger, 2013). China's post-reform urban government has been characterised as 'local state corporatism' (Oi, 1995), or 'local developmental state' (Zhu, 2004) for its entrepreneurial, profit-driven nature. In the post-reform context of devolution, marketisation reform and global capital flow, entrepreneurialism has become a vital strength dominating the China's urban spatial restructuring (Zhang et al., 2006). Among the many entrepreneurial urban development approaches, land market became a major source of local fiscal income (Ding, 2007). Since 1989, local governments were empowered to lease urban land to developers through bidding and auction. The marketisation of urban land resulted in remarkable spatial differentiation and stratification between the 'high end' and 'low end' districts (Wu, 2002). In order to produce sellable city images and attract capital investment, Chinese local governments started eradicating undesirable people such as street vendors, beggars and the homeless from prime urban spaces. This process clearly fits the first, third and fourth strands of Atkinson's framework. Additionally, the exclusionary policies are accompanied by vengeful sentiments and discursive stigmatisations against marginal groups. This is consistent with the third strand, for they depict a 'dystopian image' of Chinese cities ruined by the dirty and the uncivilised. Since Atkinson's four strands are all echoed in China's case, there is reason to believe that a revanchist urbanism is present in today's Chinese cities.

It is worth noting that although Smith's original framing of revanchism is zero-tolerance and punitive, subsequent research since 2000 has found instances of more inclusive approaches towards the urban subaltern (Los Angeles: DeVerteuil, 2006; England: Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2010; New Zealand: Laurenson and Collins, 2007). Often, accommodative or even supportive treatments contradictorily coexist with punitive, coercive laws, which complicates the actual policy landscape. In view of this, recent critiques of revanchism suggest moving beyond the purely punitive framing and understanding urban political responses to the subordinated as 'multifaceted and

ambivalent' (DeVerteuil et al., 2009), or 'post-revanchist' (Murphy, 2009). This new trend is partly because of the diversity of the homeless group, partly because of the different urban conditions across the world, partly because of the tensions within the state system (e.g. between different arms of the local government, between the local and higher-level state, or between the state and other agencies) (DeVerteuil et al., 2009), or partly because of progressive political climate at the local scale that 'renders it unacceptable to simply remove the poor' (Murphy, 2009, p. 311).

Post-revanchism is not an overturn of revanchism, but an attempt to capture the complexities of each empirical cases before rushing to identify the '-ism'. China's urban governance has its own post-revanchist characteristics as well. As Huang et al. (2014) find, Guangzhou's exclusionary strategies have turned ambivalent because it is obstructed by the resistance of street vendors and tempered by the discourse of 'harmonious society' at national level. In Chapter 6, we can see that while the laws forbid street vending, the chengguan officers are not being strict in law enforcement. Vendors can avoid being confiscated by retreating temporarily into the nearby 'safe zones' or doing business when the chengguan is off duty. Such soft approach leaves spaces for vendors to continue their business. However, after I finished fieldwork and returned to the UK, Guangzhou government eventually carried out hard approach to completely eliminate vendors in the area. This case exemplifies the unstable, swinging character of China's post-revanchist urban governance.

Another distinctiveness of Chinese urban governance resides in its incentive mechanism. Unlike capital-driven Western revanchist models, Chinese revanchism is primarily driven by local politicians' pursuit of political achievements and desire of future promotion (see Huang et al., 2014). In China's political system, local politicians are appointed by higher-level governments, and political achievement is the determinant of their promotion. The anti-street-vending policies are undertaken as tools for beautifying urban environment and attracting external investment, but against China's political background, what motivates local leaders to boost economy is that economic performance is the primary political achievement that leads to politicians' future promotion (Lin, 2012; Choi, 2012). Local political achievement also includes the 'National Civilised City' and 'National Sanitary City' campaigns (see 5.2). During these campaigns, local anti-street-vending administrations are strictly carried out as political tasks from above. Local leaders are significantly motivated by these campaigns, since they could affect their political careers.



Although China's urban development is significantly incorporated into the global neoliberal order, local politicians' eager for promotion under the Socialist political system is still the decisive structural factor of its urban politics. Such political-driven characteristic significantly distinguishes Chinese urban governance from the 'original version' of Western revanchist urbanism.

### **2.1.5 Street vending as an informal economy**

Another research approach is economically oriented, which sees street vending as part of the urban informal economy and looks at its role in the whole urban economic system, including absorbing unemployed population, providing livelihood to the poor, meeting the demand of low-end consumption, enhancing economic diversity and boosting economic vitality, especially during economic crisis (Lincoln, 2008; Maneepong & Walsh, 2013; Yasmeen, 2001). Bhowmik (2012) attributes the prosperity of street economy in cities around the world in recent decades to global economic turndown, high urban unemployment rate, regional inequality, growth of low-skilled rural-urban migration and the rise of post-Fordism. The economic studies on street vending can be traced back to Clifford Geertz (1963) who set up two ideal types of economic forms: 'bazaar type economy' (i.e. street vending and street bazaar), and 'firm type economy' (i.e. modern capitalist economy). The bazaar market economy is featured by individualised traders, person-to-person transactions, petty speculation and short-term opportunism, while the firm-centred economy is featured by impersonal transactions, cooperative organisation and entrepreneurial innovation. Geertz concludes that bazaar economy cannot lead the country to 'take off' from traditional, agricultural, peasant-ethic economy to a modern, industrial, entrepreneurial-ethic one. Such view reflected the dominant view in post-war era that informal economy is a residual, backward, inefficient economic form from the past and needs to be replaced by firm economy to make national economic development. Following Geertz's dichotomous framework, Terry McGee argues that most third-world cities consist of two juxtaposed systems of production – one derived from capitalist forms of production, the other from the peasant system of production, both systems operating in an interlocking fashion within the city economic structure (McGee, 1973). Different from Geertz, McGee found that bazaar economy actually promoted the growth of regional economy by improving commodity circulation and distribution system, lowering living cost of the poor, absorbing surplus labour force and cultivating people's entrepreneurial spirit. Santos analysed urban economy in underdeveloped countries through a similar dualistic

division: 'upper circuit' (larger modern firms) and 'lower circuit' (small-scale enterprises or individuals), the formal being capital-intensive, bureaucratically organised, fixed working hours, impersonal relation with client, while the latter being labour-intensive, family-organised, flexible working hours, personal direct relation with clients (Santos & Gerry, 1979).

Whether in Geertz's 'bazaar type economy' or McGee's 'peasant system' or Santos' 'lower circuit', street vending occupies an important position. These dualistic economic frameworks were later absorbed into the academic discourse of formal and informal sectors. Hidden behind the numerous vending stalls, there exists a huge economy system where a large portion of urban economic activities take place without being registered to government. It was described by Braudel (1985, pp. 23-24) as an 'infra-economy', a 'shadow zone ... lying underneath the market economy', yet also a 'rich zone, like a layer covering the earth'. In academia, this economy is called 'informal economy' or 'informal sector', as the opposite of 'formal' sector. According to a report of International Labour Office (ILO, 2002, p. 8), street vendor is one of the two largest sub-groups of global informal workforce. Therefore, scholarly discussions on street vending often fall into the context of informal sector. Compared with its broader proliferation 'informality' which includes a triple meaning in respects of urban territory, labour groups and governmentality (McFarlane, 2012), informal sector focuses mainly on the labour groups who engage in informal economy. The term, along with its intricate relation with formality, is gaining growing popularity in academia and playing fundamental role in today's urban development around the world, especially in urbanisation process in the 'global south'. Originally initiated by Keith Hart in anthropological circles in 1960s, the concept of informal sector was diffused into broader field only after it was adopted by ILO's report (ILO, 1972), where it was used to ambiguously refer to 'petty traders, street hawkers, shoeshine boys and other groups 'underemployed' on the streets of the big towns'. A precise definition is difficult and actually unnecessary to set, although we can draw an outline through the listed characteristics:

- (a) ease of entry;*
- (b) reliance on indigenous resources;*
- (c) family ownership of enterprises;*
- (d) small scale of operation;*
- (e) labour-intensive and adapted technology;*

- (f) skills acquired outside the formal school system; and*
- (g) unregulated and competitive markets*

(ILO, 1972, p.6)

In the early times, informal sector was often deemed as a legacy of traditional society and an inefficient, disordered development problem. The initiation of the formal-informal two-sector terminology was largely based on the prevailing division of 'traditional' and 'modern' at that time (a famous example being Lewis (1954)'s dual-sector model), which assumed that traditional economic activities is facing the danger of being penetrated by Western capitalism, while modern economy is the result from foreign investment, advanced technologies and sophisticated professional and governmental forms (Bromley, 1978, p. 1033). Therefore, it was widely believed in the 1950s that the modern market economy would eventually replace or absorb all pre-modern economic forms in the third world, because of its high labour intensity and low productivity. However, such teleological view was sharply challenged in the 60s and 70s. Instead of disappearing or being 'formalised' as previously assumed, the informal economy underwent a remarkable growth and became an integral part of urbanisation and economy system in the Global South (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 381). As suggested in ILO's report, informal sector is actually 'economically efficient and profitmaking' (ILO, 1972, p. 5) and has become an important source of livelihood for the urban poor in this era of extensive migration and burgeoning megacities. Moreover, the clear-cut definition of formal and informal sectors as two separate segments has been found to be problematic as well, because for one thing income-generating activities are *both* regulated and unregulated depending on different situations; for another thing, informal activities could be a link in the chain of the formal economy, or the other way around (Morales, 1997). More importantly, the concept is criticised for its urban-centric implication which gives a superior status to urban over rural, modern system over traditional livelihood, capital flow over local culture. That is, the production of the dichotomy itself is a performance of power (Roy, 2011; Yiftachel, 2009). From a historical perspective, it was the 'informal economy' that remained as dominant and 'formal' economic form before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereas formality was introduced to organise urban society only after the 'new invention' of formal market, i.e. what Polanyi called 'the great transformation' (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004, Ch. 1).

Against the above background, the dualistic framework has been questioned by scholars

(Bromley, 1978; Waibel & McFarlane, 2016). Some propose to replace it by ‘a continuum of productive activities, with complex linkages and dependent relationships’ between the two economies (Moser, 1978, p. 1041) to stress the totality of urban economy system as a whole, while some went further to discuss the potential of street vending economy becoming one of the alternative economies outside capitalist framework (Gibson-Graham, 2008). John Cross (2000) gives a theoretical discussion on the link between street vending and the global transformation from a modern economic/political system to a postmodern one. He identifies the harsh regulation on informality in the pursuit of control and order as an inner nature of modernity, and indicates that street vending will be more accepted in a postmodern urban governance, which is characterised by economic disaggregation, flexibility and legal plurality.

## **2.2 Contributions**

### **2.2.1 Situating revanchist urbanism in Chinese context**

To account for the motivation of government’s anti-vending policies, scholars from different countries mostly place it in the contemporary context of ‘revanchist urbanism’ which identifies the evictions as a neoliberal urban strategy of local development, but pay few attentions to their historical and sociocultural contexts. As Alfonso Morales notes, a key problem of existing literature is an ‘absence of historical memory in our understanding of vendors and vending’ (Morales, 2000, p. 76). This thesis attempts to address this gap by situating the global discussion of ‘revanchist city’ into China’s unique historical trajectory and offer a localised account of the ongoing street vending politics.

Looking back into the history, notable evictions of street vendors started as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These evictions were carried out with similar reasons as today’s revanchist policies: ensuring smooth traffic, improving sanitation, maintaining public order and enhancing city appearance (see 4.2). In an era when neoliberalism had not appeared, why were vendors already targeted by the government in a strikingly similar way? This history reminds us that government’s regulatory efforts to control, confine or extinguish street vendors are not necessarily a product of neoliberal urban governance. As such, treating China’s street vending issue with a pure revanchist approach is oversimplifying.

In order to put my inquiry in a broader context, this thesis covers a time span from imperial China to early modern to contemporary. Such a historically informed approach

allows me to trace the emergence of China's street vending tradition as well as the discursive formation of the official anti-vending ideology. Specifically, this thesis tackles three major questions:

- 1) When did street vending become an urban tradition in imperial China?
- 2) Why is street vending marginalised since the early modern era?
- 3) How does this traditional occupation survive under the contemporary anti-vending policies?

While question 1 and 2 deal with the tradition and marginalisation of street vending, which constitute the two sides of the tension, question 3 looks at how this tension unfolds in the everyday urban scene and offers a close-up of the real street vending life. Through bringing three key moments of Chinese urban history into dialogue, the thesis attempts to move beyond the revanchist approach and offer a more localised narrative of the global issue of street vending. This is not to reject the revanchist account of street vending policy, but to situate it in China's specific context and enrich it with a non-Western empirical research. While the revanchist approach reveals the neoliberal driving force of the global exclusionary urbanism against marginal groups, revanchist urbanism does not travel *in vacuo* from West to East, but necessarily gets embedded in the historical trajectories and sociocultural contexts in each place. As such, empirical studies on non-Western cases cannot be easily subsumed within a universal global theorisation. This concern has been echoed by comparative urban studies which respond the West-dominant discourse with localised research (Nijman, 2007; Robinson, 2004). Inspired by this approach, I feel the urge to examine China's street vending phenomenon within its historical context, such as China's long-standing street trading history, tradition of autonomous street life, consciousness of sanitation and public order, etc. The broader view this approach offers can yield new insights into China's contemporary revanchist urbanism.

### **2.2.2 Understanding street vending as translocal urbanism**

In 6.5.5, the thesis theorises the street vendors who have lived in city for years but still keep close connection with their rural family with the concept of 'translocality'. In recent years, the concept of translocality is garnering more and more scholarly attention in geographical literature, especially in migration studies. The translocal approach challenges the traditional notion of regional boundaries and place boundedness and emphasises that 'the world is constituted through processes that transgress boundaries',

and captures the interconnectedness between different places (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013, p. 375). From this perspective, much research has explored the multiple emplacements between rural and urban places in different countries (Brickell & Datta, 2011; Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2010; Lohnert & Steinbrink, 2005; M. P. Smith, 2011; Thieme, 2008).

Oakes and Schein (2006) studied the multiple forms of mobility in China under the concept of translocality and indicated that, spawned by China's uneven rural-urban development in the post-reform era, the social, cultural and financial linkages between city and country, interior and coast are growing because of the increasing translocal mobility. Indeed, due to China's half century of institutional division between urban and rural areas, cities and villages have developed into two disparate societies. However, unlike the urban-rural division described by classical sociologists such as Durkheim or Tönnies, today's transport and communication technologies have significantly compressed the time-space distance between cities and villages, while Internet allows virtual co-presence between people in different geographical places. Relying on these technologies, the flow of bodies, things, ideas, money and information all exchange between urban and rural areas at remarkable speed and frequency, which connects the two areas closer than ever before. It is against this background that street vendors' translocal life between their working cities and their home villages is maintained. In Rob Shields' (2013) words, their lives are 'topologically' stretched across the broad urban-rural spatial continuum. Not only their migration is translocally maintained, their marginalised situation in city also results from their translocal transgression. Moreover, their daily business has created alternative, translocal landscapes in their working places, whose chaos and congestion challenge the official modern aesthetics. For these reasons, I propose seeing street vending as a translocal urbanism, which may deepen our understanding of street vendors' lives as well as their relations to China's transitional cities.

## **2.3 Thesis structure and synopsis**

This thesis is organised into 7 chapters.

*Chapter 1* introduces briefly the formulation of my research idea, outlines China's social background in which the street vending issue is situated, and explains the reason why I chose this topic to study.

*Chapter 2* outlines the various academic approaches to the phenomenon of street vending, and then elaborates this thesis' own historically informed approach in response to the influential theoretical framework of 'revanchist urbanism'.

*Chapter 3* discusses the methodology of the thesis. It first discusses how historical archives are utilised to investigate the emergence of street vending in imperial times and the various modern transformations that caused its marginalisation. And then dwells on how I entered the fieldwork in Guangzhou to explore the living condition and everyday experience of a modern-day vendor. Reflections are given on the risks and ethical issues involved in the fieldwork.

*Chapter 4* argues that the emergence of early street vending was a result of the 'medieval urban revolution' in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The transformation of urban spatial configuration and loose regulation on street life at that time provided the soil for a new urban life featured by vibrant commercial activities, which gave rise to street vending culture. Since then, vendors have been active in the streets of Chinese cities. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the newly arising modern planning, administration, consumption culture and new ideas deeply reshaped Chinese urban life. Traditional street vending culture was found impedimental to modern city life. As a result, the authorities started to ban street vending.

*Chapter 5* analyses the emergence of China's contemporary revanchist urbanism. It finds that the post-reform (1978 to now) public discourse in the 1980s was characterised by revivals of a series of early-modern concepts that once fell into neglect in the Socialist period (1949-1978). This discursive turn prepared for the revanchist urbanism since the 1990s. Fuelled by incentives from both the municipal and the state level, local governments were increasingly concerned with creating clean and ordered urban landscapes. Street vendors, who once enjoyed a short laissez-faire policy in the 1980s, were targeted as the source of urban disorder and dirtiness and faced government's eviction. Through analysing two state-led urban campaigns that mobilised massive evictions of vendors across the country, the thesis argues that today's exclusionary urbanism bears remarkable resemblance to the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century urban governance.

*Chapter 6* looks at the case of Tianhe CBD, Guangzhou, which offers a vivid picture of street vending in a Chinese megacity. The modern transformations that contribute to the marginalisation of street vendors – modernist urban planning, formal economy, and

chengguan's interference on public life – are all reflected in the case. In reaction to government's exclusionary policies, the vendors have developed strategies to continue their business in these urban settings through the manipulation of time, space and the social capital of *renqing*. To better understand the everyday vending life, the chapter explores the residence, wandering experience, spatial recognition and sense of place, and concludes that most vendors do not fully settle in the city, but maintain a translocal life across the urban and rural regions.

*Chapter 7* concludes that the marginalisation of street vendors is essentially a result of the mismatch between traditional and modern urban life. In contemporary China, this mismatch is translated into the conflict between rural and urban culture, and is practised by migrant vendors as a translocal urbanism.



## Chapter 3

# Methodology

### 3.1 Archival research

Archive texts are analysed to look at the role of street vendors in traditional Chinese city life (especially in 11<sup>th</sup> century), the formation of anti-vending ideology at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the contemporary exclusionary urbanism. These three historical moments are specifically picked because they are most crucial to the understanding of China's street vending culture. To support my historical research, various archives are drawn, including historical records, literature, official documents, newspapers and periodicals. These materials were obtained from Sun Yat-sun University Library's collection of Republican period newspapers as well as online databases, including: Peking University Library's Collection of Late-Qing and Republican Old Newspapers<sup>9</sup>, National Index of Newspapers and Periodicals<sup>10</sup>, China: Trade, Politics and Culture, 1793-1980<sup>11</sup>, Dacheng Database of Old Periodicals<sup>12</sup>, Chinese Historical Documents<sup>13</sup>, Erudition Digital Platform<sup>14</sup>.

Simple coding was adopted in data analysis. Helpful data were coded by topics such as 'sanitation', 'urban planning', 'anti-street-vending policies', etc, and these topic codes were again coded by time ('imperial era', 'early-modern era', 'Socialist era' and 'contemporary') and kinds ('facts' and 'discourses'). However, when reading the materials, analyses naturally emerged; and the analyses and hypotheses again naturally led me to more readings. Therefore, I did not separate data collection and data analysis strictly, but let them flow from one to another throughout the process.

Archives reveal historical facts, such as modern road construction, establishment of police system and appearance of food markets. These new things greatly transformed Chinese urban life and contributed to the marginalisation of traditional street vending. Archives also allow me to delineate the historical development of certain ideas. Specifically, the thesis focuses on how the ideas of public morals, sanitation and city

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<sup>9</sup> <http://mgqk.lib.pku.edu.cn>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.cnbkys.com>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.china.amdigital.co.uk>

<sup>12</sup> <http://laokan.dachengdata.com/tuijian/showTuijianList.action>

<sup>13</sup> <http://bz.nlcpress.com>

<sup>14</sup> <http://dh.ersjk.com>

appearance emerged in early modern Chinese society. In historical archives, we can see that government, intellectuals and media's use of certain neologisms (*wenming*, *weisheng*, *shirong*) played a crucial role in spreading and publicising these ideas. After being introduced by intellectuals, they entered official text, affected policymaking, and eventually transformed Chinese urban life and contributed the anti-vending ideology.

From a Foucauldian view, discourses shape our conceptions and practices in social life. Through the use of particular vocabularies, discourses not only 'facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said' (Parker, 1992, p. xiii), but also 'construct objects' which we can think of and refer to (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 148). Through discursive operations, discourses usually have a 'regulatory orientation' and allocate differential rights among related agents (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 148). Take street vendors for example, although the newly emerged terms (*wenming*, *weisheng*, *shirong*) were presented as 'objective and value-free', they constituted 'a form of social control' over the vendors (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 148) by providing a vocabulary which positioned vendors as particular kinds of objects: as threats to the 'civilised' public order and as dirt to the 'city appearance'. Such discursive constructions contributed deeply to the marginalisation of street vendors in early modern era (4.2.4 and 4.2.5). More importantly, since the 1980s, Chinese government's propaganda extensively re-invoked these discourses to justify the exclusionary urban governance (5.2). Therefore, the archival research is not only about the past, but also deepens our understanding of contemporary urbanism.

### **3.2 Selection of fieldwork case**

The fieldwork was conducted in Guangzhou from July to December 2015, with a pilot study done in 2014 to test out the practicality of the research. Guangzhou is a southern city with 14 million population<sup>15</sup> (ranking the third in mainland China). Every year, the city's rich consumption culture has been attracting migrants from all over the country to make a living by selling things in the street. According to official estimation in 2010, there were 3 to 5 million vendors living in Guangzhou (Qiu, 2010). I chose the Teemall shopping centre in Guangzhou and its surrounding business area (thereafter referred to as Tianhe CBD) as my main fieldwork site, because it offers a fine example of vendors encroaching on central urban area in order to earn livelihood and at the same time rewrite the official imagination of urban space. The CBD is planned as the city's business and shopping centre, with 4 shopping malls, several office buildings, the largest stadium and bookstore of the city all packed together, and numerous small shops and

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<sup>15</sup> According to the 2016 data from Guangzhou Statistics Bureau.

restaurants scattered among them. Over the years, the CBD has been a strict-control area in chengguan's work plan because the government intended to create a modern image to accommodate the high-end services here. However, the place is never free from vendors. Every day, vendors from different places of the city crowd into the CBD to sell various merchandise next to the classy modern buildings and upscale malls. Therefore, the Tianhe CBD typically represents the juxtaposition of heterogeneous population and things that typically characterise a modern city: the locals and the migrants, the middle class and the lower class, the formal enterprises and informal petty retail, and the traditional and the modern.

The objective of case study is to 'capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation' through studying a typical case that is informative about the many other cases (Yin, 2009, p. 48). The Tianhe CBD is a fine example showing how the migrants' need of livelihood conflicts with the government's pursuit of modern landscape. Guangzhou's large inflow of migrant population and pursuit of modern landscape is shared by many big cities in China today. In an era when more than a fifth national population are 'floating' population (Gao, 2017), all the first-tier Chinese cities are facing massive inflow of rural and small-town population looking for urban employment. As the formal urban labour market is highly competitive, many migrants are forced to turn to informal jobs, street vending being a major choice. To cope with the problem, the exclusionary urbanism against street vendors is a nationwide phenomenon which can be found in most cities. Therefore, the Tianhe CBD in Guangzhou offers a typical case that can be generalised to the nationwide clash between street vendors and the government.

Initially, I intended to do fieldwork in two places, the other one being Mianhua Hutong, an old neighbourhood in Beijing. Street vending in this residential area offers a meaningful comparison supplementing my findings in Guangzhou. While vendors in Tianhe CBD are more entrepreneurial, vendors in Mianhua Hutong are more integrated into the local communal life. Unfortunately, the government evicted all the vendors in this place not long after my fieldwork started in the name of 'transferring low-end business and population', so I had to give up this fieldwork case and focus on Tianhe CBD, Guangzhou. However, I still utilised some data gathered from the Beijing case in 7.2, so as to enrich and extend the Guangzhou case.

### **3.3 Semi-structured in-depth interview**

I interviewed 7 chengguan officers to find out their interpretation of policy texts and the actual implementation of policy. I got in touch with chengguan officers through the assistance of Prof. Xiangdong Wan in Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, some of whose students worked in the City Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau. The interviews were in order to find out the official attitudes on street vending and their daily law enforcement practices. The interviews of officers were overt.

40 street vendors were interviewed in the street, in restaurants or in their home. In the pilot research, the interviews were conducted overtly, with interviewees' full knowledge of my identity as a U.K. PhD student. However, although I made it clear that it was an academic research and the data would only be used for my thesis, it still caused their suspicion and mistrust. In my pilot research, many refused talking to me because they were afraid that I might be an undercover reporter who would disclose their information to the government. Even for those who were willing to be interviewed, the time for interview was limited because it disturbed their business, and they did not have much time after work.

To overcome these impediments, in the formal fieldwork, I decided to go covert by becoming a street vendor and carry out interviews through chatting while working with other vendors. I ordered 50 conch shell ornaments from online and a foldable desk that is suitable for quick packing and escaping when chengguan officers arrive (there are such foldable desks specifically made for street vending on Taobao.com). This method turned out to be successful. Claiming to be a university student who wanted to earn some extra money by street vending and curious about other vendors' lives, I was soon accepted by other vendors. We worked together every day, circumvented chengguan officers and managed to find places to sell. Later, I was also invited to some of their homes in urban villages. The general information of street vendors was collected during this process, such as their daily schedule, their temporal-spatial business pattern, their relationship with the chengguan and strategies to cope with them, their residence, their connection with family, etc. By becoming a member of their group, I could directly participate their daily activities and 'gain a more authentic impression of people and their worlds' (Given, 2008, p. 134). Another advantage of covert method is that it increases the trustworthiness of data because the informants are not aware of being observed, hence they are not led or affected by the researcher, and unlikely to deviate from their normal behaviours.

However, a drawback of covert method is that it ‘may offer only limited information on specific issues that cannot be explored with participants through everyday social interaction’ (Given, 2008, p. 135). Although working together with street vendors opened a window to their world, my understanding remained somewhat shallow and fragmented, because all the knowledge about them was gained through daily chit-chat, which lacked depth. For this reason, in the later part of my fieldwork, I also conducted 7 formal, extended, semi-structured interviews, so as to have deeper and more comprehensive communication. To avoid drawing too much attention, I did not reveal my identity as a U.K. PhD student, but explained that the interviews were part of an assignments of my university course. This explanation was accepted smoothly, based on my established identity as a university student. These interviews may be called semi-overt, since I did reveal my academic purpose, but still hid my true identity. In this stage, I was able to ask deeper questions such as:

- 1) their understanding of sanitation (‘Do you think it is important to keep the city clean?’, ‘Do you think you have spoiled urban environment?’);
- 2) opinions about the policy (‘Why do you think the chengguan always drive you away?’, ‘What kind of street vending policy do you look forward to?’);
- 3) attitudes to the chengguan (‘Are you afraid of them?’, ‘Have you been violently treated by them?’);
- 4) connections with family (‘Do you live with your wife/husband?’, ‘How often do you contact your parents?’, ‘How often do you go back to your village’);
- 5) personal feelings (‘Do you miss your family?’, ‘Do you feel you are a Guangzhou citizen?’);
- 6) life courses (‘what else work have you done before?’, ‘how long have you been engaging in street vending?’, ‘Why did you choose to become a street vendor?’) and
- 7) future plans (‘How long do you plan to continue street vending?’, ‘Do you want to do other works in the future?’).

Sketch mapping was also conducted in this stage to study street vendors’ spatial cognition. The interviews were led by a prepared brief outline, but my strategy was to leave more space for the informants themselves to talk, which could make the content more trustworthy and sometimes bring out unexpected information.

Due to street vendors’ mobile and unregistered characteristics, random sampling was

almost impossible. For this reason, non-probability sampling was adopted, which included accidental sampling (chatting with the vendors who worked around me) and snowball sampling (finding the next sample according to the recommendation of the last sample). Since the sampling was not probabilistic and I did not deliberately control the types of interviewees in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and hukou, the data are only descriptive of whom I accidentally encountered in Guangzhou's city centre, rather than statistically inferential to the population. Among the 40 vendors interviewed, 3 were Guangzhou residents with urban hukou; 19 were from small towns and villages in Guangdong province; 20 were from nearby provinces such as Guangxi, Jiangxi and Hunan, and 8 from other further provinces. The majority of them were full-time vendors, 9 were part-time, including 2 construction workers, 1 security guard in a gated community, 3 clothes workshop workers, a couple who drove to the CDB and used their car as a stall to sell shoes, and a retired university professor who sold calligraphy brushes in the front of Guangzhou Bookstore. This echoes the media reports of more white-collar workers moonlighting as street vendors out of their interest in a different lifestyle (Xinhua, 2009; R. Yang, 2015). All informants are Han ethnicity. In terms of age, the majority was between 20 and 50, 7 were under 20, One was above 50. Female street vendors were less than male, accounting for 13 among the total 40 informants.

Interview transcripts were coded to facilitate analysis. In the first cycle, transcripts were coded into several aspects: descriptions (age, place of origin, whether have been confiscated by chengguan, etc.), attitudes (whether content with current policies, whether think street vending affects urban environment, etc.) and emotion (places where the informants got visibly happy, angry, sad, embarrassed or confused). I also noted the places where different informants' narratives were similar (e.g. the experience of being confiscated by chengguan) or different on the same topic (e.g. whether they think street vending affects urban environment), or topics frequently brought up by informants (chengguan's harassment, the declining rural economy, hardship of earning livelihood, etc.). These codes were made in parallel on the same transcripts to give different analytic lens that filter the raw data. In the second cycle, the initial codes were summarised into broader categories such as 'livelihood', 'family', 'self-identity', 'sanitary concepts', etc. Coding is 'the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis' (Saldaña, 2015, p. 4). Through these coding strategies, the raw interview data were structuralised, the patterns of narratives emerged. This enabled me to grasp the main ideas on a higher level and eventually progress to more abstract theorisations.

Covert research required me to engage in street vending, which I never had. The role involved certain risks. Aside from running away from the chengguan officers, I also confronted prostitutes soliciting clients in the urban villages. Although these were carefully avoided, however, one thing did happen unexpectedly. When I was interviewing a vendor in his home, he verbally suggested sexual behaviours and touched my thigh. I immediately rejected and quitted the room. Luckily, he did not chase me. Although nothing serious happened, the harassment did raise my awareness of various unexpected risks in the fieldwork, and reminded me to be vigilant during the fieldwork.

### **3.4 Sketch mapping**

To study street vendors' walking experience and spatial cognition, cognitive mapping was adopted along with the interview. The concept of cognitive map was first developed by Edward Tolman, who found rats can learn the surrounding spatial layout and use it to navigate in a maze by building up mental maps (Tolman, 1948). Afterwards, Kevin Lynch (1960) used sketch mapping method to externalise the inner mental map of urban dwellers, which influenced subsequent geographical studies. During my interviews, I encouraged vendors to draw maps of Guangzhou as many as they can remember, so as to find out how and how well the street vendors see the city. The graphic data gathered can serve as a vivid complement to the text data gathered from interviews. Moreover, through analysing these maps, we can reveal certain social factors and life modes that have shaped the mental map.

### **3.5 Participant observation**

Working together with vendors in the street allowed me to go through the whole process of their work and part of their leisure time. During this process, plentiful information was collected through my observation on their activities and behaviours. For example, the routinised spatial and temporal pattern of peddling practice, the daily commute between home and the vending sites, the relationship with other vendors, the encounter with chengguan officers, etc. These observations supplemented the interview data by confirming my interviewees' narrations as well as enriching the information that were not conveyed by words.

Covert participation requires the researcher to enter a group's social world, which usually involves a process of learning about the group's subculture. For example, some of vendors' conventions were new to me, such as choosing the proper place to start selling, giving up my place to 'senior' vendors, running away from the patrolling

chengguan officers, etc. I also learned that income is a sensitive issue that most vendors would be embarrassed and sidestep from answering. Besides, knowledges on certain verbal or body languages used by this group is required, such as *kaizhang* (made the first deal of the day), or '*laile*' (the officers are arriving). These slangs are unfamiliar even for a native Chinese.

During the observation, I also adopted photography as a visual approach to represent the visual data that cannot be conveyed by words. Photos allow me to capture certain meaningful scenes, such as the scenes of vendors peddling and chengguan officers patrolling, or simply document living condition of vendors' residence. Especially, I paid attention to visually represent the clean and tidy urban environment and vendors' transgression into it, because such contrast directly illustrates their mismatch with modern urban settings and the way their appropriation of space reshapes urban landscape.

### **3.6 Reflections on ethical issues**

As mentioned above, the main part of my in-depth interviews was conducted covertly (or semi-overt), which means I purposefully obscured my identity and intentionally misrepresented my motivation for engaging in social interaction. Such research method is often criticised as ethically unsound for it 'represents an invasion of privacy and violates the norm of informed consent' (Given, 2008, p. 134). Aware of these ethical flaws, covert research was certainly not my initial choice. However, when it came to practice, it was difficult for me to explain my academic purpose to the street vendors. Their most common response was 'what's the point of that?'. Especially, PhD was not an approachable identity for street vendors, but more of an obstacle in interaction. A vendor said he 'had never talked to a PhD.' Some vendors were suspicious on me because it was weird for them that someone want to write a PhD thesis about them. Another reason I got rejected was that my interview indeed interrupted their business. It was also difficult to conduct proper interview after their work, because they finish very late. After many times of failure, it seemed to me that covert method was the only choice. Therefore, I finally chose to hide my real identity and claim that I was an undergraduate student who want to earn some money through street vending. This easy-to-understand explanation reassured my informants immediately, and greatly facilitated my research. However, the possibility still exists that I may have trumped doing something my informants expressly refused. Therefore, this section reflects on the ethical issues in my use of covert method.



Firstly, my research did involve certain degree of deception on informants. However, I tried to minimise my deception by choosing undergraduate student as my represented identity, which is close to my true identity. After all, undergraduates and PhDs are both university students — just a difference in degree. Actually, the Chinese word I used (*da xue sheng*) could mean both ‘undergraduate student’ and its literal meaning ‘university student’. By choosing this ambiguous term, I hoped to minimise the necessary deception and save some space for future explanation. As Thorne (1980, p. 287) notes, the line between being ‘informed’ and ‘uninformed’ is often unclear, hence all research is covert in some ways (Roth 1962, 283). Therefore, I would consider my research as ‘mildly covert’ and should be differentiated from those espionage-agent-like research in which the researcher typically hides his/her real identity to join an illegal or criminal group. The deception and betrayal are much milder in my case. Additionally, I used my disguised identity only when I had to, that is, only when the informants asked and there was no way to avoid.

Secondly, covert research is less problematic when it is conducted in ‘public places, where it may be presumed that individuals know that others will see what they are doing’ (Given, 2008, p. 134). Street vending is a public occupation that is visible to all passers-by, which means they are fine with being watched by strangers. Therefore, I did not specifically ask for oral consent when observing and photographing them. The photos of vendors’ home were taken with permission, though.

Thirdly, street vendors are suitable for covert methods, which ‘are used mostly in studies concerned with individuals who engage in what are conventionally perceived to be morally contentious or illegal activities (Given, 2008, p. 134)’. However, street vending is only ‘illegal’ in a very weak sense. It should not be confused with other illegal activities such as theft, sex trade or drug dealing, because it is neither criminal nor immoral, nor does it result in harm to others. Therefore, there was no ethical struggles in my mind when starting my street vending career. The only thing to take care was how to avoid chengguan officers. Thankfully, chengguan officers in Guangzhou had become politer in law enforcement, so there was no conflict happened to me and my coworkers during the fieldwork.

Finally, I have tried my best to protect my informants’ privacy, safety, interests and feelings. First, all informants in the thesis are referred to in pseudonyms. Second, no

vendor's information was disclosed to the chengguan officers. In terms of economic interests, the shellwork product I chose to sell was different from other vendors around me, therefore not much competition of business was involved. In turn, no extra reward was given to my informants as well. All the interviews were done in an equal, non-beneficial way. Additionally, being aware that street vendors are a vulnerable, marginal group in Chinese society, I had been careful on choosing my topics and expressions in conversations with them, so as to avoid making them feel stigmatised, marginalised or exploited. This was actually more of a rule in the overt interviews because in the covert fieldwork, since I became a vendor as well, it was natural to talk to them as equal individuals. Lastly, before I finish the fieldwork, I told the vendors I knew that I would stop working with them, so as to avoid hurting their feelings. As I wrote in 6.3, the relation between vendors is a loose network with mutual assistance. For such 'acquaintance' kind of relationship, cutting off connection does not involve too much emotion.

If my informants found out my real identity, it might make them feel deceived and disappointed, but certain explanation could effectively ease their sentiment. First, as noted above, my covert identity *da xue sheng* leaves some space for explanation for me. I could explain that PhD student is also a kind of *da xue sheng*, which literally means 'university student'; introducing myself as a *da xue sheng* was more a modest way to describe my identity rather than a lie; maybe there were some mistakes due to different interpretations, but it was not my intention to deceive them. Second, the reason vendors kept distance from me was my unusual PhD identity, rather than my requests to know about them. There are vendors who talk a lot with their customers about their lives and become personally acquainted, which means they are willing to disclose their situations in an informal manner, but they feel uncomfortable when it became a formal inquiry. Therefore, I could explain that obscuring my PhD identity was more to sooth their doubts and remove the obstacles between us rather than deliberately cheat them or make use of them. I believe that through sincere explanations, my informants can understand me, and their potential dissatisfaction and disappointment can be consoled.

In sum, covert method was a reluctant choice in the situation when I could find no other ways to progress my research, and it was used only when it was unavoidable. I have tried to use covert method in an ethical way. The potential negative effects on informants have been reduced to minimum. Additionally, my covert identity and real identity are not fundamentally different, which makes the deception in my research was

in a weaker sense compared to 'deep covert' researches (Fine, 1980, p. 124). As Richard Mitchell notes, certain degree of hiding information about the research project and adjusting the self-representation of researchers exist in nearly all research methods as a means to facilitate access (Mitchell, 1993, p. 54). Given the reflections above, I think my adoption of covert method is acceptable.

## Chapter 4

# Street Vendors in Chinese History

### 4.1 Life in imperial Chinese cities

Today, street vending is disapproved by the Chinese government. But in the past, it used to have a positive image and constituted an important part of imperial city life. The question, then, is *when* and *why* did the time-honoured urban tradition become an undesirable eyesore in modern city? To answer the question, this section first traces back the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when the earliest street vending economy appeared in Chinese cities.

#### 4.1.1 Rebuilding urban life in Song Dynasty



Figure 4.1 Section of Qingming Shanghe Tu. Source: The Palace Museum Website (故宫博物院网站) <sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/228226.html>

Figure 4.1 is a section of one the most famous Chinese painting, *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* (Qingming Shanghe Tu). The piece, painted by Zhang Zeduan (1085–1145), vividly depicts a daily scene of the capital of the Northern Song, Bianjing (today's Kaifeng). Through meticulously portraying the everyday city life, the painting offers us a glimpse of the city life back then. What stands out most remarkably from the painting, is the crowded, bustling street, the numerous human characters of various professions, and the vibrant atmosphere of street life. The vibrancy comes from people's eye contacts, body gestures and movements, all of them different yet connected with each other. The painter shows impressive skills to organise all these small figures in a rhythmic order, which leads viewer's eyes to move from one place to another without being bored.

Scholars have proved that the early Song China (circa 1000 AD) witnessed an unprecedented prosperity in its cities, with rapid growth of urban population and flourishing urban economy (McDermott & Yoshinobu, 2015). Especially, commerce and money came in and played a crucial role in the new urban economy. China in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century could no longer be characterised by the long-existing self-sufficient natural economy, because commerce and market trade had increased prominently, particularly in the south, and the use of money as a medium of exchange for goods and services expanded greatly (Ebrey, Twitchett, & others, 2010, p. 388; Shiba & Elvin, 1970). The economic prosperity also gave birth to a vibrant urban culture. Historical literature documented the dazzling variety of commercial activities in the streets of Bianjing: shops of silk, cloth, cap, jewellery, jade, rhinoceros horn, gold and silver, aromatic incense, book, flower, restaurants catering food from different regions of the country, tea wards, wineshops, theatres, brothels ... The *wazi* (pleasure district) gathered stunts, games, theatrical stage performances, taverns, food stalls and singing girl houses, each entertaining thousands of audience through the night. Many people were used to dine in restaurants and seldom cooked at home (Gernet, 1962, p. 184; Meng, 2014; West, 1997). Among the numerous trades thriving in the city, street vending was a member not to be neglected. Look at the painting above, we can spot many vendors conducting business in different forms: in spot A, a vendor set up a sunshade and a table, building a temporary small restaurant on the bridge; at spot B, a vendor put up a stall to display his wares; in spot C, there are three stalls next to each other: a shoe-repair stall, a knife stall and a food stall selling steamed buns; in spot D, a vendor is holding a stick with accessories and peddling to a woman. Through attracting and interacting with

passers-by, these vendors liven up the street space, and contribute to the richness of street life.

Literature abound about the rich street culture formed by peddlers in Song Dynasty. Accordingly, in the capital of Northern Song, the Emperor's Street (*Yujie*) and its adjacent streets and alleys formed a prosperous district. Aside from numerous restaurants and entertainment places, the streets were loaded with vendors. The Zhou bridge (*Zhouqiao*) became a famous scene in the city because of the aggregation of various vendors there. All kinds of food, 'stir-fried, stewed, boiled, or raw', with variation in each season, were sold here every day till late night (Chuntang Li, 1996, p. 15). From Zhou bridge to Xuande Gate was officials' approach to the court every morning, but in the rest of the day, the road was transformed by vendors into a street market that 'sold cloths, paintings, curios and jewels till midnight'. After a brief pause, the morning market started again at 3-5 am, 'selling food and drinks, calling in tunes of all kinds' (Meng, 2014, vol. 3). The morning markets even supplied the court every day when maids and officials went out of the court to purchase fresh food (Chuntang Li, 1996). Jacques Gernet, when picturing the everyday life of Song, notes:

*... the numberless pedlars of various types who went about the streets shouldering their poles, or set themselves up at street corners or in the markets... Each had his special street cry, if he did not simply attract the attention of customers by beating on a piece of wood or metal'.*

(Gernet, 1962, p. 94)

Vendors' cries were performative and each with its own rhyme, rhythm and lyrics. Their tunes and lyrics were made into poems and songs to be performed in theatres and courts (Gao, 1988, p. 496), and even appeared in the emperor's poem: 'girl's laughter is heard behind curtains; flower peddlers' cries are heard throughout the street<sup>17</sup>.' These street cries were constantly heard throughout the day and blended into the everyday life of the city. 'The yelling of vendors in the street, the chanting of monks in nearby temples, the reading of students in the school, the chatter and laughter in the brothel, all joined together lively (Chuntang Li, 1996, p. 14).' Through these historical records, along with the painting at the beginning, a scene of imperial Chinese city life a thousand years ago is rebuilt in front of us.

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<sup>17</sup> '帘底红妆方笑语，通衢争听卖花声', Emperor Huizong, 宫词 (Poems in the Court).

#### 4.1.2 Medieval urban revolution and the rise of street culture

It is noteworthy, however, that the thriving street vending culture mentioned above only came to prosperity since approximately the 9 – 11<sup>th</sup> century. Starting from Han (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC - 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD)<sup>18</sup>, the spatial pattern of Chinese city is the *Li fang* pattern<sup>19</sup> (Z. Du, 1990, p. 200; Friedmann, 2005), which means the residential wards (*li/fang*) and marketplaces were enclosed by uniform walls and divided into standard, chessboard-like grids by vertical and horizontal streets, forming a perfect geometrical symmetry (see Figure 4.2). Such planning model was based on the ancient prescriptions of *Zhou Li* (Rites of Zhou) and was believed to be aligned with the spiritual nature of Heaven (Skinner & Baker, 1977, pp. 33–74; Steinhardt, 1999, pp. 33–36). The model was also a means of social control: the ward gates were closed at night and not allowed to pass; the streets between wards were only for traffic; commercial activities were confined within the official markets, no shops were allowed to open along streets (Liu & Lai, 2008, p. 44).

The *Li Fang* pattern reached its peak in the Tang Dynasty (618–907), before it was loosened in late Tang. By the time of the middle Song Dynasty (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century), the pattern eventually collapsed<sup>20</sup>. Ward walls were demolished, shops were lined up along streets, night activities were allowed and night markets became prosperous. Commercial and residential activities were no longer segregated from each other, but rather ‘mingled in the web of city streets and alleys’ (Xu, 2000, p. 71). The transformation deeply transformed the Song cities: wards and official markets progressively sank into total collapse; private houses, shops and other business opened directly towards the main streets ... (Kato, 1953). Kaifeng, as depicted in *Qingming Shanghe Tu*, provided an example of the new Chinese cities that abandoned the previous aristocratic and administrative model and embraced popular culture and predominant commercial life (Gernet, 1996, p. 317). From the plan (Figure 4.3) we can see that the square-shaped wards and marketplaces of *Li Fang* pattern are gone and replaced by the interwoven street network.

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<sup>18</sup> The accurate time of the beginning of *Li fang* pattern is in debate (M.-W. Liu & Lai, 2008, p. 59).

<sup>19</sup> *Li* and *Fang* are largely synonyms referring to city wards.

<sup>20</sup> The time of *Li Fang* pattern's total collapse is debatable between late Tang (S. Liu, 1992, p. 470; Shiba & Elvin, 1970, p. 33) and late Northern Song (Kato, 1953, pp. 283–285).



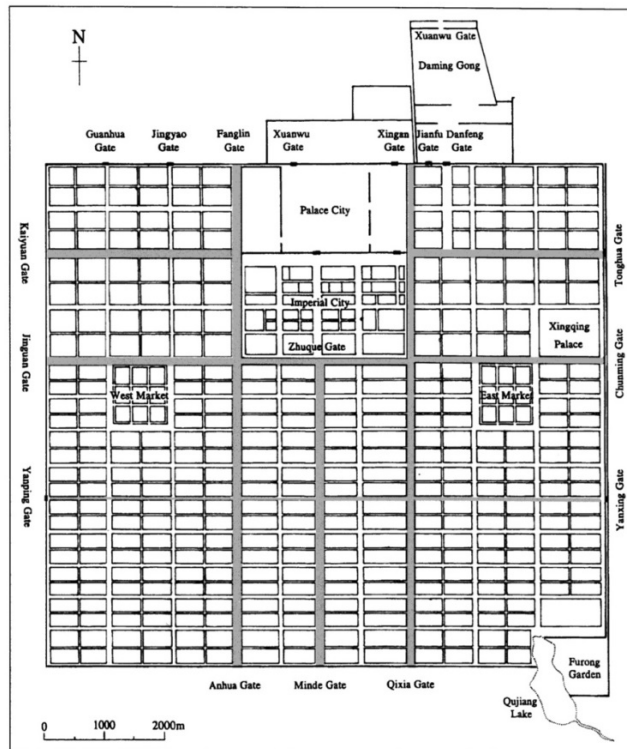


Figure 4.2 Plan of Chang'an, capital of Tang dynasty, a fine example of Li Fang system <sup>21</sup>.

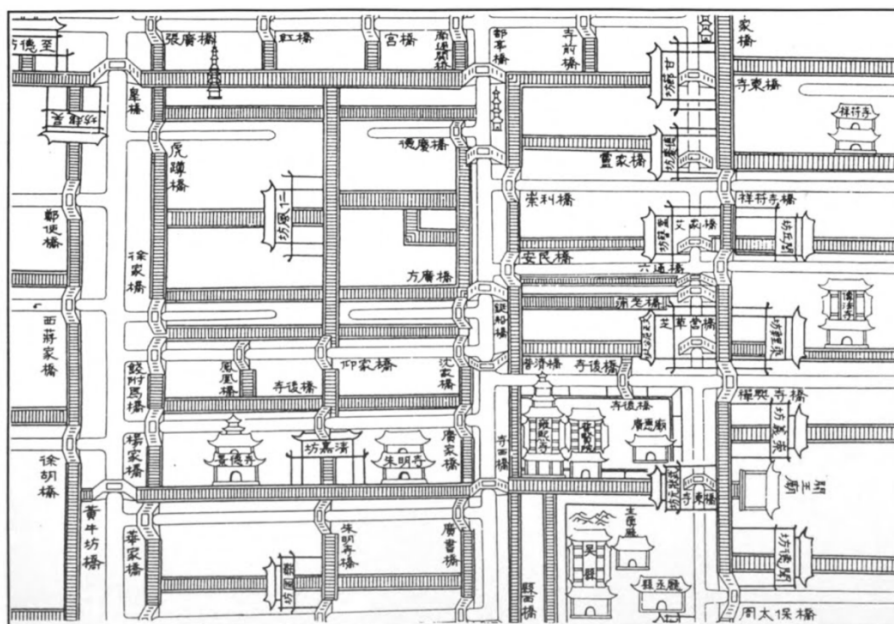




Figure 4.3 Plan of a part of Suzhou city in Song dynasty (Xu, 2000, p. 71)

 : street  
 : river

<sup>21</sup> Picture from *Cities of Aristocrats and Bureaucrats: The Development of Medieval Chinese Cityscapes* (Heng, 1999, p. 16).



Note: representation of streets and rivers are straightened

Academically, this dramatic transformation of urban morphology and urban life is known as 'the medieval urban revolution' (Elvin, 1973; Skinner & Baker, 1977, pp. 23), and it was regarded as a watershed in Chinese urban history. It comprises a deep and comprehensive transformation of market, administration, technology, monetary and urbanisation in the Song Dynasty. Skinner sums up its salient features as: 1) the relaxation of limitation of market amount in each county; 2) the collapse of the official marketing organisation; 3) the disappearance of the enclosed marketplace and the walled wards, replaced by 'a much freer street plan in which trade and commerce could be conducted anywhere within the city or its outlying suburbs'; 4) the rapid expansion of the area of cities and the growth of commercial suburbs outside city gates; 5) the emergence of 'great numbers of small and intermediate-sized towns' with important economic functions. This revolutionary transformation was powered by the growing urban population and accelerating commercialisation of regional economy, and these powers were released by government's withdrawal from regulation of mercantile activities. The medieval urban revolution began in the Lower Yangtze areas during the second half of the 8th century and culminated during the Southern Song Dynasty, while the rest parts of China experienced the revolution during the late imperial times (14 – 20<sup>th</sup> century) (Skinner & Baker, 1977, pp.23-24). As the result of the booming urban economy, a new urban civic culture started to develop with their own taste and requirements distinct from the aristocratic upper class. Jacques Gernet calls it 'the Chinese Renaissance' to denote the refreshing intellectual, cultural, technical changes that took place round about the year 1000 (Gernet, 1996, p. 274).

After the collapse of ward walls, there emerged numerous unplanned narrow streets and alleys, which constituted intricate street networks between the officially planned main streets (Ouyang & Li, 2007). While the main streets were of official origin, the unplanned streets were of popular origin. The urban morphology, as such, could be likened to a skeleton (planned streets) filled by numerous bottom-up improvisations (unplanned streets), and together they constituted a tree-like or fishbone-like network<sup>22</sup>. Yet, this transformation was not only physical, but also conceptual. City streets prior to Song were largely symbolic and ritual, serving as a tool to demonstrate the power of ruler. The Song cities departed from the 'cosmologically proper principles of city planning' and developed 'a fairly high degree of economic and social sophistication'.

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<sup>22</sup> The fishbone street pattern can still be seen in Beijing's old neighbourhoods (see 7.2).

Moreover, along with the comprehensive and persistent retrenchment of government control in local affairs, city streets became the practical and conceptual embodiment of 'public space' that were open for all residents of and around the city for their daily activities (Xu, 2000, p. 71-74). The multiple uses of streets, especially the commercial uses, gave rise to a vibrant street culture, and infused the Song cities with popular and mercantile characters. After Song, the opened streets became an everyday stage of urban life, where business, social life and political propaganda took place (Xin & Tao, 2010). Without walls and curfew regulations, wards continued to exist as an official establishment, but lost actual control over residents. Streets replaced wards to become the typical characteristics of the 'new' Chinese cities (Gernet, 1996, p. 317) and the primary element of spatial cognition system in a city (Liu & Lai, 2008; Xu, 2000, p. 74). 'People no longer found their way about the town by the names of the districts, but by the names of the streets (Gernet, 1996, p. 317).'

It was amid this vibrant commercial atmosphere that the early street vending appeared. The unplanned growth of spontaneous streets and the retrenchment of street-level bureaucratic control provided the soil for street economy. The dense, intricate and interconnected street network created abundant street-side and corner spaces for the commercial activities of vendors (J. Wang, 2008, p. 8). The streets also connected main roads with local neighbourhoods and enabled vendors to reach every household by peddling along the alleys. Meanwhile, the growth of street vending was enabled by the ruler's eased control over street life. Sometimes, the court even showed leniency and lessened taxes on them (Tong, 2005, pp. 296-297; Unokichi, 1994, p. 243) because of the traditional 'people-based' governance philosophy (*yi ren wei ben*).

The appearance of peddlers was well documented in historical records. 'Business never ends in the streets of Hang city, from day to night... From Neihou Gate to Guan Bridge, vendors can be seen in every street and alley, no matter it is rainy or sunny... Near Hening Gate, there are vendors all over the street selling all kinds of vegetables, snacks, fruits, and seafood, shouting and calling in all different ways (Z. Wu, 1980, vol. 13)'. 'Snack vendors walked through streets and alleys, carrying a shoulder pole decorated with lamp and playing a small drum. They can be seen everywhere in the streets (Meng, 2014, vol. 6).'

In the following history, street vendors have been active on the streets of Chinese cities and become a part of the tradition of urban life. Although the late imperial era witnessed a 'restorationist adherence to orthodox norms' in urban planning (Xu, 2000, p. 74), street vending remained as an essential urban business. In the copied

versions of Qingming Shanghe Tu that represented urban scenes in Ming-Qing period (14<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century), peddlers were extensively portrayed as one of the main figures in the street<sup>23</sup>. Often, streets crowded with vendors were adopted as a positive symbol of the prosperity of society. For example, Yang Kan's *Huangji Fu* (皇畿賦) described the capital of Song: 'few streets are not crowded, and horses are almost unable to pass through' (坊無廣巷市不通騎). Here, the blocked streets were not a negative description, but a praise of the bustling city life of common people. Similarly, some genre paintings depicted streets crowded with peddlers during the emperor's grand imperial tour<sup>24</sup> to represent the country's prosperity under the rule of the emperor. These materials reveal a different concept of order from today's popular view: vibrancy of city life was praised in the first place, even at the cost of certain degree of disorder.

Through the late imperial era, peddlers have become part of the 'theatre of the street' and part of 'the visual and auditory culture of Chinese cities' (Henriot & Yeh, 2012, p. 109). A Chinese writing in the 17<sup>th</sup> century wrote:

*Peddlers cry out their wares when they hawk. People could recognise from the sound what kind of good he sells and even who the peddler is. ... In Peking's March, when peach blossom is in bloom, street cries of peddlers are heard all over the street, forming beautiful music. Later when the blossoms fade, their cries become prolonged and sorrowful.*

(Xuan Shi, 1986)

Gernet (1996, p. 318) indicates that since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a type of 'new Chinese towns' came into being, with an unprecedented urban agglomeration and a 'real' urban mode of life that distinguished cities from the countryside. If so, then it was amid this new urban life that street peddlers made their debut onto the stage of Chinese history. Four aspects of this 'new Chinese town' could be attributed to the appearance of street vending: the prosperous urban commerce, the dense street network, the priority given to vibrancy over orderliness, and the relatively autonomous street life. The following sections will show how this urban form was interrupted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by modernisation and how it deeply affected street vending.

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<sup>23</sup> See Qiu Ying's version in Ming Dynasty and five court painters' version in Qing Dynasty.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.learn.columbia.edu/nanxuntu/html/scrolls/index.html>

## **4.2 Late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century: dawn of modernity**

### **4.2.1 Street peddlers in late Qing**

Imperial Chinese history is often thought to have a uniform continuity, and viewed as a relatively ‘cyclical sequence’ with a ‘fundamentally stable order’ that would have remained an agrarian society eternally (Wright, 1962, p. 3). The Chinese cities were also thought by many as lasting ‘essentially unchanged’ from the imperial era well into the present century (Murphey, 1984, p. 188). These notions are questionable because there did exist certain internal tensions within Chinese history itself, such as the 11<sup>th</sup> century urban transformation discussed above. But they also make sense because, at least for the late imperial era, many of its internal tensions were overshadowed by the unprecedented modern transformations since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whether seeing from John Fairbank’s approach which sums up Chinese modern history by China’s response to the West and the contradiction between tradition and modernity (Teng & Fairbank, 1979), or acknowledging Paul Cohen’s critic of the Western-centric distortion of this approach (Cohen, 2010), the dramatic changes that happened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century undeniably exerted deep and thorough influences on the country, and marked the dawn of a modern China out from its prolonged tradition. Especially, the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895 is seen as a ‘turning point’ in China’s modernisation, for it encouraged modern industries and initiated the transformation of urban forms (Skinner & Baker, 1977, p. 220). Therefore, this section focuses on the history from 1900s to 1940s. It was the time when tradition and modernity coexisted and clashed in all aspects of the society, from elites to commoners, for culture to institution to everyday life. It was also the time when the eviction of street vendors started.

By the time of the 1900s, street vending was still prosperous in Chinese cities, as they had been for centuries. Their figures were seen in the Hutongs (alleys) in Beijing (Strand, 1989, p. 44), Lilongs (neighbourhoods) in Shanghai (Lu, 1999, pp. 198–217), or Chengdu’s streets (D. Wang, 2003, pp. 69–73). Comprised primarily of peasants from nearby villages and underclass urban residents (J. Hu, 2007, p. 34), peddlers engaged in a variety of business, from food cooking to retail of daily necessities to services such as shoe repairing, haircutting, ear cleaning and so forth, covering every aspect of a city’s daily need. The vendor economy constituted an indispensable part of commoners’ urban life and contributed significantly to the city’s vitality (Lu, 1999, p. 199; D. Wang, 2003, p. 69). An American found Beijing a city where seven hundred thousand people’s daily needs were supplied by street peddlers (Constant, 1935, p. xiv). He wrote:

*... the peddlers of all kinds who play a most important part in the scheme of Chinese life. Their number is legion – they sell, buy, exchange, mend, entertain and cater to the personal wants of man in almost every conceivable manner.'*

(Constant, 1935, p. iii)

City streets at that time were the overlapping spaces of shops, workshops and peddlers, which all encroached their activities onto the street. In fact, throughout the late imperial China, the proliferation of street-side vending stalls had actually reshaped city streets by gradually narrowing the wide boulevards of the original urban plans (Esherick, 2002). As a noticeable element in streetscape, peddlers figured prominently in early Western photography of China. They combined 'various forms of Western gaze on Chinese society: aesthetics, exoticism, ethnography and voyeurism'. Under the gaze of colonial<sup>25</sup> photography, the peddlers in street met the need of Westerners who searched for evidence of an orientalist imagination where China was perceived as 'an overpopulated, chaotic and, as a result, poor country', standing in contrast to the modern West (Henriot & Yeh, 2012, pp. 101–103). Not only the image, the sound of their street cries also captured Westerners' ears. '(It is) full of audible colour and is one of the outstanding features of life in the Peking "hu t'ung" (alleys)', and gives 'an insight into the life, habits and psychology of the Chinese people which no other field reaches (Constant, 1935, p. iii).' Simply put, peddlers became emblematic of the 'Chinese city' for Westerners (Henriot & Yeh, 2012, p. 122).



Figure 4.4 Peddlers by the street. From left to right: a cooked food vendor, a fortune-teller/public scribe/physician, a barber, and a wood-turner.

<sup>25</sup> Historically, China was a semi-colonised country, but the Eurocentric discourse that assumes Western normality and pre-eminence applies to its culture and urban construction in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The photo in Figure 4.4 was taken by Scottish photographer John Thomson in late 19<sup>th</sup> century China. He explained the photo as such:

*In every large city these sort of people (street vendors) are to be counted by the thousand, and though in our towns we should class them as tinkers or costermongers, this nomenclature would by no means comprehend the accomplished handicraftsmen whom we fall in with at every street corner in China, men far too poor ever to aspire to the dignity of a settled shop, seeking their employment in the public highways, and by wandering from door to door.*

(Thomson, 1874, 'Street Groups, Kiu-kiang')

Purchasing from peddlers was one of the daily routine for residents. The uncomfortable housing condition at the time made common people used to hang out in the street and have meals from street eateries and peddlers. The street was the recipient of this spillover of social life (Henriot & Yeh, 2012, p. 121). Over time, peddlers and residents had built stable and personal relationships of mutual reliance and trust. Since vendors took fixed route at the same time every day, they appeared in each alley at roughly the same time (Lu, 1999, p. 207). The time of different vendors' appearances constituted a regular timetable for residents to make purchases. Meanwhile, peddlers also bore in mind the names of their customers, and even knew their favourite food so as to restock specially for them (R. Qi, 1993, p. 88). Another evidence of their trust was that they frequently traded on credit. For example, breakfast vendors always drew a line on the wall as a mark instead of asking for payment immediately (J. Li, 1937, p. 647).

Beyond the newly built asphalt roads and the bustling car traffic, in the back alleys where most people lived, the calls and shouts of vendors still constituted the main part of the city's soundscape (Z. Meng et al., 2011, p. 78). Residents were perfectly familiar with their cries, because they were heard as the vendors hawked their merchandise from lane to lane every day. These street cries became the sound memory of a city, and were poetically represented in literature<sup>26</sup>:

*As the seasons change, the crying of peddlers also changes with respective characteristics, some beautiful and melodious, some sorrowful and deep. There are connections between the tones and the goods they are selling, and these cries*

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<sup>26</sup> See A. Boutin (2005; 2015, pp. 105–128) for similar street cries in Western literature.

*make people feel the circulation of seasons.*

(Yang, & Zhao, 1984, p. 69)

Unlike today, the pervasive existence of vendors did not appear to be a problem for the rulers, but was taken as an organic part of city life. Even in Beijing's Qianmen Street, the central artery that the emperor took in ceremonies, the wide thoroughfare was perennially packed with vending stalls during the rest of the year, leaving only a 3-meter passage. The peddlers were sent away only during the ceremony days, and soon returned afterwards (R. Qi, 2006, p. 70). However, ruling class' attitude to vendors was gradually changing at the turn of the century. Police were sent to clear them from streets. Regulations were made to ban street trading. Clashes happened from time to time. Why did this change happen? The following sections will answer this question with reference to a series of cultural, economic, institutional and urban planning backgrounds of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese city.



Figure 4.5 Sketches by Feng Zikai (1992) capturing vendors in Shanghai. Top left: Residents in upstairs lowering a basket to purchase rice pudding from hawker. Top right: a won ton hawker with his shoulder pole. Bottom left: a peddler selling straw mats. Bottom right: a street barber cleaning customer's ears.

#### 4.2.2 From street to road

To begin our historical inquiries, I first look at the transformation of urban morphology, especially the construction of modern roads.

Streets have been regular markets in the history of Chinese city for a thousand years. Since the above-mentioned ‘medieval urban revolution’, streets were considerably freed from state control and enjoyed relative autonomy. The lack of top-down intervention gave rise to a community-like neighbourliness of street life, and made streets ‘the main form of civic space in Chinese cities’ (Miao, 2010, p. 52). Streets were not only transport lines, but also the everyday life spaces of neighbourhood where the common people interacted with each other, held folk rituals and ceremonies, and conducted all sorts of recreational and commercial activities. Street space was the stage of artisans, labourers, Buddhist monks, Daoist priests, magicians, storytellers, fortune-tellers, idlers, playing kids, and among all these street figures, the petty traders who carried baskets, pushed carts or set up stalls to sell all sorts of goods in the street (D. Wang, 2003, pp. 23, 68–96). All day long, itinerant vendors hawked their wares through the streets. Thanks to their prevalent existence, residents could get all their daily needs in just a few steps walk from their houses (D. Wang, 2003, p. 39). Some streets were almost transformed into marketplaces by the gathering vendors. Many streets were named after the kind of goods that vendors used to sell, such as ‘salt street’ (*Yanshi Kou*) in Chengdu or ‘vegetable street’ (*Caishi Kou*) in Beijing. These names are still in use today<sup>27</sup>. They are the evidence of the once close connection between vendors and streets.

Such traditional street life was interrupted by the construction of modern roads and road administration in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chinese cities in those days could be compared to Paris under Haussmann’s renovation or London in Victorian era, when the new city plans destructed medieval urban texture and created the environment of modern life. In the centre of the new planning was road construction. The Chinese city streets at the time were ‘narrow, crooked, poorly-paved, filthy and malodorous’, seriously blocked by the overflow of street performers, artisans and peddlers who encroached on the street and left only ‘a six-foot passage’ for traffic (Ross, 1911, p. 3). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when more and more Chinese people visited concessions, the broad and grand avenues bustling with cars and trams, paved with asphalt and lit by lamps deeply impressed them. An article described the Shanghai concession:

*Western-style buildings rising high into the clouds, streets and lanes  
criss-crossing the city, so complex that even residents could get lost. Streets*

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<sup>27</sup> Similar naming of place reflecting mode of use could be found in European medieval cities (Smail, 2000, Chapter 1).



*were wide enough for three or four carriages running abreast... and levelled  
and paved with macadam to avoid getting muddy in rain'*

(Sun, 2004, p. 45).

Hankou concession was described:

*Streets in concessions are clean and tidy, with good public order maintained by  
patrolling police ... in contrary, Wuhan's streets and alleys are terribly  
disordered, people relieve themselves in the street, hang laundry in the street,  
and pay no attention to sanitation and traffic order. Thefts go rampant at night.  
It is embarrassing when compared with concessions.*

(Ce, 1986, p. 97)

From these writings, we can see that the Western streets occupied a central place in Chinese elites' admiration of Western modernity. Additionally, modern road was required to facilitate the increasing traffic volume and the speeding new modern transport such as rickshaws, tramways, buses and cars. The *Capital Construction Plan* in 1929 wrote: 'The construction of urban road is the foremost work of urban construction. ... Roads in the city are like vessels in human body (Li, C. et al., 2015).'

Hence, construction of modern road was carried out in many cities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The old dirt streets were straightened and widened, paved with asphalt or macadam, built with sidewalks, planted with roadside trees, and installed with street lamps (Esherick, 2002, p. 1). The lofty old city walls were torn down to make place for constructing ring road (Yeh, 2000, p. 114).

Along with road construction came the road administration, which was carried by the police. The police, as a state apparatus of domestic power exercise, marked the early-modern expansion of state power in European countries (see Foucault, 2007). Likewise, the police system was also established in China as the 'pioneer agents of the modern Chinese state' (Strand, 1989, p. 65). Learning from the Western and Japanese police systems, China founded its police institution in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first official formal police organisation was the *Gongxun Zongju* (General Bureau of Road administration and Patrolling Police) set up in Beijing, 1902. As the name showed, early police activities were centred on the road. Since the road/street was the primary locus of social life, the police were involved not only with the road itself, but the various aspects of public life happened there. In 1906, Police Bureau's responsibilities expanded

to almost every urban issue, such as public health, safety, civil engineering construction, fire-fighting, household registration, custom rectification, maintaining social order, and was empowered to make regulations and settle administrative and judicial affairs (C. Guo, 1998). During this process, the traditional autonomous street life was gradually put under the interference of state power. A newspaper article *Hankou Street Market, Territory of Peddlers or Police?* (1908) mourned that streets as ‘the territory of ancestors’ was gradually lost; ‘people’s street’ was gradually turned into ‘government’s road’. In fact, the police functioned so extensively that, before the municipal-level governments were established, the police served as the administrative body of early Chinese urban governance (D. Wang, 2003, p. 159). A parallel case of police’s expansion of duty range can be found in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Foucault points out that the concept of ‘police’ at that time did not signify the crime-fighting institution in its modern sense, but referred to ‘the set of means by which the state’s forces can be increased while preserving the state in good order’, and the maintenance of road circulation was ‘a privileged object for the police’ (Foucault, 2007, pp. 333, 408).

With the power of police, the increasingly interventionist state was able to reach its control into streets, neighbourhoods and every corner of social life. In order to keep the smooth running of urban traffic, the police patrolled to stop activities that blocked traffic flow or disturbed traffic order, among which peddlers were the primary target (D. Wang, 2003, p. 133). As shown in 4.1, traditional street spaces were the venue of neighbourhood-scale public life, and the primary workplace of peddlers. As the new planning set out to transform old streets into modern roads, the customary way of life was endangered. As early as 1908, the Qing government has issued regulations forbidding peddlers to set up stalls along street and riverside (Shanghai Commercial Press Compiler Institute, 2011, pp. 10–18). After the establishment of Republic of China in 1911, municipalities around the country paid attention to rectify urban order. In a letter Zhili Province Police Office wrote to Tianjin City Council in 1912, it was mentioned that the proliferation of peddlers seriously disturbed traffic order by encroaching on the sidewalks and made them difficult to pass. The letter urged Tianjin City Council to remove peddlers from streets, saying ‘it will be dangerous for pedestrians if we do not ban peddling in these roads with heavy traffic (Jia, 2006, p. 67).’ Comprehensive regulations made specifically on street vending have appeared in the 1920s, and the implementation became stricter in the 1930s (Wei, 2014).

The police’s crackdown on peddlers cut the source of their income and left them in

desperate situation. An article said, 'every time the police rectify road traffic and ban peddling, us commoners could not make a living. Our parents, wives and children all depend on us to survive. If the condition goes on, we have no choice but becoming thefts or beggars. How miserable we are! (G. Hu, 1989, p. 848)' In reaction, vendors sometimes gathered to present collective petition to local government for considering their interests. Occasionally, when the situation escalated, petition turned protests or violent conflicts. Massive conflicts included the Hankou peddler riot in 1908, the Tianhou Gong peddler riot in Shanghai, 1923, and the Shanghai peddler riot in 1946 (Wei, 2014). The Hankou riot in 1908, for example, was triggered by a police order that required all vending stalls stop their business in the reason of 'clearing the road and rectifying order'. The police specially assigned additional force to remove peddlers from the streets one by one, and detained several peddlers who refused to leave. The dissatisfied peddlers, together with shop owners and other working class, went on a strike to protest against the order and attacked several police offices, causing paralysis of the whole city. The event ended up with government's compromise which allowed the peddlers to sell in the streets again (Jia, 2006). The contradictions between peddlers and traffic ran through the first half century. As late as 1949, when the new Communist government took over Beijing, the large number of peddlers was still a major problem to traffic. Mayor of Beijing said 'now the social order is in urgent need to be rebuilt, and the problem of peddlers and traffic is the foremost urgency. To rectify traffic, we must cope with the peddlers. They are interrelated problems (R. Chen, 2009, p. 45).'

'From street to road' was a profound change in Chinese urban history. The modern roads were so different from the traditional street that they were given a new word '*malu*' or '*lu*' to differentiate it from the traditional *jie* (street). The difference was not only in their physical forms (broadened, straightened and paved), but also in their conceptual implications. The Chinese concept of street/*jie* after Song was the public space of Chinese city (Xu Yinong, 2000, p. 74), the space of neighbourhood life and an extension of domestic life. Literally, the Chinese word 'neighbourhood' (*jie fang*) is a combination of 'street' (*jie*) and 'lane' (*fang*), which linguistically evidences that the streets and lanes were the field of neighbourhood life. It is true that the traditional streets were open to all residents, but the use of 'public' here needs to be clarified. A public space, in the Western sense, refers to a space that is separate from the private space of individuals. But in the traditional Chinese streets, boundary with private and public life were vague; street life and domestic life always merged into each other (Henriot & Yeh, 2012, p. 121). Such concept of *jie* typically represents the logic of

traditional Chinese social organisation, conceptualised by Fei Xiaotong as ‘differential mode of association’ (Fei, 1992/1947, p. 60), that is, the social organisation through differentially classified webs of personal social relations. The differential mode of association consists no definite boundary between group and individual, public and private, but only personal relations of different significances. As a result, traditional Chinese society lacked the concept of ‘public’ and public morals, which was criticised by early modern intellectuals (Liang, 1998/1902). Different from the street, the modern road was designed as a domain of the public, which represented the Western sense of public-private division. Thus, the transformation from street to road actually required and fostered the rise of a ‘public consciousness’ and the respect of public order in early modern China. Such transformation of concept also contributed to legitimising police’s road administration, because road was a public domain, the state was the embodiment of the public, and the police was the apparatus of state power. This rise of public consciousness will be readdressed in 4.2.5.

The building of modern road was a central part of Chinese modern urban planning. In the 1920s, comprehensive urban plan projects were undertaken in many cities across the country. These projects showed remarkable uniformity in emulating Western (including Japanese) planning prototypes, such as Haussmann’s plan of Paris, the Modernist planning headed by Le Corbusier, and American City Beautiful Movement (Sun, 2017). Haussmann placed the easing of vehicular movement at the core of his planning. His Paris renewal, in the pursuit of ‘salubrity, cleansing, aerating, movement’, turned the chaotic, moribund and suffocating medieval streets to boulevards that are clear, bright and grand (Jordan, 1995, Ch. viii). In his plan, streets that ‘had been for walking to work or shops and for socialising’ were now ‘primarily for movement’ (Ellin, 1997, p. 18). This was later endorsed by Le Corbusier’s modernist planning, which sees street as only a machine for mass transit, and sees other things in the street as obstacles of traffic flow.

These Western planning ideas were soon brought into China. Since the 1910s, most of the new plans were made by young planners educated in Japan, Europe, and especially the in U.S. (Esherick, 2002, p. 7; Stapleton, 2007; Xue, 2005, p. 72). When they were carried out as practical constructions, they significantly reshaped the medieval urban fabrics and the way of life based on it. ‘We must kill the street!’ said the modernist, waging war against the old streets (Berman, 1988, p. 168). As streets gave way to modern transportation, the traditional street life was also uprooted. Although the road

constructions in China once stirred opposition and resistance (Yeh, 2000, p. 114), they were eventually implemented under the push from the government. As a result, traditional spaces were destructed under the rolling flow of modern traffic, only maintaining their existence in the alleyways and neighbourhoods where the impact modern life had not yet reached (Esherick, 2002, p. 13; Lu, 1999, p. 13; Mo, 1934). This transformation affected the street vending culture directly, because the latter required the traditional use of street, namely, streets used as public spaces for the 'everyday recreational, social and professional activities of the lower class' (D. Wang, 2003, p. 69) rather than pure traffic lines. Once the streets were turned into road, vendors lost their workplace. In the modern traffic order, they became an obstruction that needed to be cleared away.

#### **4.2.3 Modern business models**

Another early-modern transformation that impacted street vending was the new retail business models, especially the department store and modern food market. Both of them were supported and regulated by the government, and thus became the dominant retailing business. They greatly transformed urban residents' consumption habit, and eroded much of the market of traditional street vending.

Food market (*caichang*) is an indispensable public facility in today's Chinese city. However, the idea of a concentrated indoor food market was new to urban dwellers until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In late imperial cities, vegetable and meat were normally supplied by shops and street vendors (Lu, 1999, pp. 244, 270; Shi, 1996, p. 202). The first food market was opened in 1864 in Shanghai. In those days, although the Western concessions allowed peddlers to enter in order to meet the increasing food demand, but peddlers' scattered location and unfixed business time brought difficulty to management and also caused hygienic problem (Xue, 2000, p. 54). To cope with the situation, British entrepreneur Thomas Hanbury came up with the idea of moving nearby peddlers into one spot and carrying out uniform management. He opened the first food market in the French Concession in Shanghai in 1864 (Lu, 1999, p. 270-271). Cooperatively, the French Concession Council required all food peddlers in the concession to sell in the market. Decades later, food markets following Hanbury's model were widely built in many cities by Chinese municipal governments as a standard component of urban planning (Hu & Li, 2012). Under the management of police, these markets had to comply with detailed regulations such as separating sections for dry food and wet food, flushing floors and cleaning stalls every day, and performing sterilisation to ensure food

safety (Z, Zhang et al, 1999, p. 276). Stall owners were required to register their names and goods, and were subject to administrative inspections to prevent dishonest transaction (Chu, 2005).

Government's promotion of food market was an effort to regulate the unruly street vending activities. Food market was not merely the gathering of peddlers, but a locus of modernity. Representing the modern concepts of management, order, cleanness, hygiene, and contract consciousness, food market served as a force of China's modernisation (Hu & Li, 2012). Along with school, hospital, factory and army, the food market was part of the whole modern system that sought to incorporate every element into one uniform order. Such comprehensive state control is an inner urge of the modernist ideology (Scott, 1998). Similar to European states' early-modern expansion, the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century China also witnessed an expansion of state function from a 'small government' to a 'big government', from a state that neglected control of grassroots society to one that grasped resources and took control of every aspect of social life (Z. Luo, 2012). Street vendors, who used to be out of the reach of the state, were then under its control and absorbed into its formal regulation. As the markets became 'the formal' and the 'proper' place for vendors, the vendors in the street became the 'informal' and 'improper', namely, the source of disorder and chaos that needed to be removed or formalised.

The formally established food markets were in fact closely linked to the informal activities of street vending. Most food markets were established at the places where peddlers regularly gathered, and the stall owners mostly came from previous food vendors. At the beginning, food markets did not win in its competition with street vendors. The first market opened by Hanbury failed to benefit and was closed in just three months, because the residents were satisfied with purchasing food from door-to-door peddlers, and many of the edibles sold by street peddlers were not available in stores or food markets (Lu, 1999, pp. 200, 270–272). It took decades for urban residents to adjust to this new mode of retail. During this period, street vending economy coexisted with formal markets. But by the 1930s, modern food markets have become a regular establishment in all major Chinese cities. Shopping at food market became a new custom and a symbol of 'being modern' for well-off households, because they were known for clean environment and well-regulated trading order. Meanwhile, shopping from peddlers was considered less decent. Although peddlers were still prevalent in people's daily life, their economic role gradually became supplementary (Lu,

1999, pp. 271–275).

Another new consumption model in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was department store. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were Western-owned department stores in concessions catering exclusively for Western clients. In 1917, Chinese entrepreneur Ma Yingbiao opened the first Chinese-owned department store that targeted at Chinese customers. His successful business model was followed by other Chinese entrepreneurs. Inspired by the Western model, these department stores provided high quality consumer goods from daily necessity to luxury items, including foreign merchandises imported from all over the world, and displayed them openly and tastefully in elegant glass counters. They forbid haggling, and sold all goods at expressly marked price. To enhance shopping experience, all department stores offered friendly and courteous service and were furnished with gorgeous interior decoration, equipped with air conditioners, elevators and neon lights. Built with magnificent Western style mansion and located in the most bustling district, the department stores soon conquered the consumer market and earned popularity among both Westerners and Chinese middle class (W. K. K. Chan, 1982; Cochran, 1999, pp. 30–33).

Moreover, department store changed Chinese culture's attitude to consumption. Historically, material excess and commercial activities were opposed by the official Confucian ideology, which saw thrift as a virtue and agricultural production as the foremost economy. To change this public opinion, the department store companies put a lot of effort into cultivating the public's recognition of commercial culture. They published newspaper and magazine advertisements with persuasive texts and pleasing pictures that passionately praised their goods. As the business grew, more functions were added to department stores, such as tea house, pub, restaurant, theatre, etc. The stores eventually became a centre of consumer culture and a place of Western/modern experience (Cochran, 1999, pp. 35–36; Kikuchi, 2006). These refreshing new concepts successfully altered the public opinion of consumption. Shopping became a bourgeois culture and a form of recreation, rather than filling the need of livelihood. While this new fashion gained superiority, the old street vending economy was under the shadow of cultural stigma. They were attached with a negative image, an image of backwardness, dirtiness and poverty, as opposed to department store's luxurious, modern, elegant image. A distinction was drawn among people according to whether he/she bought from peddlers or from stores, the latter being considered of higher social status and better taste (Moxi, 1934). Thus, street vendors/vending became marginalised

in modern urban society both economically and culturally.

Another cultural difference between modern food market and department stores and peddler trading was the emergence of contract consciousness. As Fei Xiaotong states, in traditional consanguineous society, 'people exchange with *renqing* (personal relationship)'; trust was based 'not on the importance of contracts but, rather, on the dependability of people' (Fei et al., 1992, pp. 43, 127). Trading in traditional urban communities was based on interpersonal familiarity, like exchanges between acquaintances. This is reflected clearly in the way street trading was practised (see 4.2.1). But trading in food markets and department stores were more like purely beneficial relations, or exchanges between strangers. The appearance of food markets and department stores thus contributed to China's transformation from a consanguineous society to a contract society. Getting rid of personal relationship, the buyer and seller became strangers connected by pure beneficial relations, and the price of commodities became determined purely by market mechanism. As noted by Georg Simmel, 'stranger' was a typical modern personality (Simmel, 2004/1900, pp. 224–228). In this sense, food market and department store contributed to the making of 'modern man' – man of calculative rationality, pragmatism, optimism, hedonism and consumerism.

As food markets eroded peddlers' niche of daily foodstuff, department stores stole peddlers' business of daily necessities. However, these modern businesses did not totally replace street vending, even with the support from the government. The government had been striving to incorporate the unruly street vendors into formal organisations such as food market or department stores, but faced frequent resistance. For instance, a large number of peddlers were unwilling sell in food market, because they had to pay an amount of rent. Rather, they set up stalls around the market to steal customers from the market. Sometimes these vendors were driven away by the police, sometimes, under the pressure of their petition, they were permitted to stay (Chu, 2005). In 1908, Tianjin government proposed to build a department store and relocate peddlers in it, so as to prevent peddlers from appropriating street space. However, the peddlers petitioned the authorities to cancel the project because they could not afford the rent (Tianjin Archive et al., 1989, pp. 838–839). With its tenacity and flexibility, street vending lived through the dramatic modernisation process in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as an important supplement to formal food market and department store. In the chaotic wartime when formal markets and stores faced depression, it became the dominant source of goods again and fed the city with numerous spontaneous informal trading (Lu, 1999, p. 275;



Chu, 2005). As the state had never achieved its total governance, the coexistence of street vending and formal retail outlets, of the old and the modern, the unregulated and the regulated, remained a common situation throughout the early modern era. This situation can also be seen in today's Chinese city.

#### **4.2.4 Appearance and sanitation as modern orders**

The third aspect to investigate is the growing attention on city appearance and sanitation.

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Western concessions and treaty ports were established one after another in China's coastal cities. These Western enclaves deeply impressed Chinese visitors with their advanced municipal engineering and administration achievements. Kang Youwei, the leader of reformist elites, after visiting Hong Kong, said 'seeing Westerners' gorgeous architecture, tidy road, ordered police, I realised they have wisdom in administration, and should be no longer seen as barbarians (Kang, 1992, p. 115).' A newspaper article wrote:

*In concessions, roads can reach everywhere, while ours are much less convenient. The concession is really clean, with no dust on the road ... while although we have Cleaning Bureau, our rivers are smelly, back alleys are full of faeces. It's earth and heaven compared with the concession.*

(J. Zhou, 1996, p. 261)

From these descriptions, we can see the well-developed modern road system and the clean, neat and ordered cityscape were the two achievements that most impressed Chinese elites. The former has been discussed in 4.2.2. This section discusses the latter.

Historical literature has documented Chinese cities in 19<sup>th</sup> century as 'dirty, disorderly, unhealthy, and inefficient' (Esherick, 2002, p. 2). City streets were 'the receptacles of all kinds of filth', which produced offensive stench. In the rainy days, filthy water flooded the road and formed ponds filled with stinky mud and garbage (Li, 2008, pp. 228–229). Beijing, the empire's capital, was messy, filthy, smelly, bumpy, dusty, and muddy in rainy days. Its streets were always filled by garbage, peddlers and vending stalls, always noisy and crowded. Often, there were people relieving themselves in the street (Chiu, 2004). However, even it was sometimes frowned upon by people, such situation continued to exist throughout the Qing dynasty (Xu, 2015; Chiu, 2004). It was when

Western cities and concessions came into Chinese elites' vision that the Chinese government realised its own cities were problematic and in urgent need to be improved (Li et al., 2015). Judged in comparison to the Western treaty ports and concessions, the criticisms of Chinese urban environment were mostly centred on two aspects: city appearance and sanitation. Two new words, *shirong* and *weisheng*, emerged at the time and were frequently adopted by mass media and official texts to identify the two problems and to educate the masses about their importance.

'*Shirong*' is the Chinese word for 'city appearance'. Although unclear of the time of its first usage, it certainly had been in usage in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Political rhetoric such as '*zhengdun shirong*' (rectify city appearance) or '*gaishan shirong*' (improve city appearance) were frequently adopted in Republican government's public announcements when it carried out constructions or administrations. Despite the neutrality of its literal meaning, the appearance that *shirong* really implied was an urban aesthetics that was 'modern' at the time, namely, one that followed the models of European and American cities, especially the Beaux-Arts architecture and the City Beautiful Movement in the US. Both of these models were characterised by their pursuits of tidiness, orderliness and grandeur. The ideal urban environment in the eyes of Chinese elites, was the Western cities with grand boulevard, broad plazas, beautiful parks and magnificent modern buildings, while the ragged, lower-class peddlers were considered unsightly. Through publicising the concept of *shirong*, especially using it with positive terms such as 'improve' or 'rectify', the government created a problematising discourse against the existing urban environment, which served to educate the people about the advance of the new urban aesthetics and attach legitimacy to its eviction of street vendors. As such, *shirong* was one of the most common reasons mentioned in government's orders of banning street peddling. For example, during the Hankou vendor riot in 1908, the Police Bureau ordered to clean all street vendors in the city for the reason of creating a tidy city appearance to welcome the visit of a general (B. Wang, 2002, p. 96). In 1927, the government of Jiangsu province banned street food trading and built food market in the name of 'tidying up city appearance' and 'rectify traffic' (Editing Committee of Jiangsu Province Document, 2003). In 1932, the mayor of Beijing pushed radical administration construction, and ordered all districts to remove street peddlers and stalls in order to enhance city appearance (Qiu, 2004). In 1946, a massive vendor uprising occurred in Shanghai when the Government issued ordered to ban peddling for the reason that 'the great number of peddlers not only obstructs traffic but also spoils *shirong*' (Hu & Li, 2013, p. 98). A regulation of Wuhan Police Bureau

claimed ‘nothing disturbs traffic and damages *shirong* more than peddlers’ (Wuhan Archives, 1948).

The rising attention on *shirong* represented the central place of the pursuit of visual appearance in political leaders’ mind in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from administration on public activities, *shirong* also involved physical constructions through urban planning. Through the many *shirong* projects, the elites and leaders intended to remake Chinese cities into a modern, grand image, so as to display a national proud (Esherick, 2002). Even the road constructions discussed in 4.2.2 were not simply in purpose to accommodate modern traffic, but partly out of an aesthetic concern. When Kang Youwei advised the emperor in 1898 to refurbish the roads in Beijing, the reason he stressed was not about traffic, but to ‘make a grand view (以壮观瞻)’ (Liang, 1954, p. 46). The same phrase was also used in an official order: ‘to make a grand view, related departments please immediately move all sorts of food peddlers near Daqing Gate and Zhengyang Gate out of the city wall (Su, 2008)’.

Another problem of urban environment was hygiene and sanitation. Personal hygiene and urban sanitation in late imperial China were generally in a poor condition. This can be evidenced by the criticisms from the Westerners who visited China. George Macartney, who led the earliest British diplomatic mission with China in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, wrote in his diary: ‘[t]he people, even of the first rank, ... are yet in their persons and customs frowzy and uncleanly.’ Their clothes were ‘extremely coarse and ill-washed, the article of soap not being employed by them. They seldom have recourse to pocket-handkerchiefs, but spit about the rooms without mercy, blow their noses in their fingers, and wipe them with their sleeves or upon anything near them (Robbins & Macartney, 2011, p. 396)’. British doctor John Wilson criticised Chinese hygiene habit for the lack of body cleaning and the poor condition of dwelling, and concluded that Chinese ‘are essentially a filthy race’ (Wilson, 1846, p. 23)<sup>28</sup>. Urban sanitation was under extensive criticism as well. Garbage and dead animals were thrown in the street, which jeopardised public health. In most cities, drains were for the most part ‘choked up and broken down’ and became ‘the receptacles, as open ditches, of the city garbage and filth’. John Dudgeon (1877) thus concluded: ‘China is, par excellence, the country of bad smells (p. 12-14)’.

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<sup>28</sup> Opposite evidence showed that government responsibility for public health and personal cleanliness did exist in premodern China, though in a dispersed, weaker way (Needham, 1970, pp. 340–378).

The science of hygiene and urban sanitation originated initially in Western countries. In order to prevent the breeding and spread of bacteria, cities like London and Paris started constructing modern sanitation since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially the integrated sewerage system. The sanitary engineering projects were considered as a great achievement of modern society (Allen, 2008, p. 34), and were later exported to their oversea colonial cities, such as Calcutta and Singapore (Kaviraj, 1997; Yeoh, 2003). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, sanitary projects were embarked in the Western concessions in China. The Chinese elites were impressed by their improvement of urban living condition, and realised the importance of cleanness and the necessity to import Western sanitary science (L. Du, 2014). Since then, China went through a process of introducing Western hygienic and sanitary knowledge (see Lei, 2009; Liang & Furth, 2010; MacPherson, 1987; Yip, 1995). Below is a notice posted on newspaper by the police in 1905 that was teaching the people in Beijing the importance of cleaning street:

*'The capital [Beijing] is the greatest city, and hence all its streets and valleys should be kept clean and tidy. Every resident, together with the police, should clean their streets.' Otherwise, 'not only it is shameful if seen by foreigners, but the stench can easily cause disease. ... Cleanness and tidiness have significant effects on weisheng. 'Weisheng' means guarding life. Hence, cleaning street is so important that it is related to our lives.'*

*(Da Gong Bao, 1905)*

Here, a new word '*weisheng*' was introduced and explained to educate commoners the concept of hygiene and its importance – as important as guarding one's life. *Weisheng*, referred to both personal hygiene and public sanitation, was in fact new to all Chinese people at the time. It was introduced to China only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century from Japanese-made Chinese word *eiser*<sup>29</sup>, which also meant 'hygiene/sanitation'. Promoted by the reformist elites, the Qing government established Hygiene Department as part of the Police Bureau in 1905. Police were appointed to fulfil a wide range of tasks, such as regulating public behaviours (spitting, littering, public defecation, etc.), examining medical schools, inspecting hygiene situations and granting hygiene certificates, cleaning roads, implementing quarantine, and making hygiene-related regulations (J. Zhou, 1996, pp. 64–65). The police even entered residents' houses to check their

<sup>29</sup> Englishman John Fryer first adopted *weisheng* from ancient Daoist text to refer to the chemical science of hygiene and sanitation, but it was Japanese Nagayo Sensai who elaborated the word in the context of municipal administration in the 1870s (Rogaski, 2004, Chapter 16). The latter meaning was later introduced to China through Liang Qichao.

hygienic condition and health habit. By bringing together public health (sanitation) and private health (hygiene) into a single term *weisheng*, the new concept entailed state's power and responsibility to administrate citizen's body and everyday life. Under a Foucauldian 'biopower', personal behaviours, indoor and outdoor, public and private, were all under the gaze of power, and subject to the discipline of the state (L. Du, 2014; Rogaski, 2004, p. 300)<sup>30</sup>.

The concern of *weisheng* led to the problematisation of street vendors, because of the garbage and dirty water they produced (Song, 2010, p. 12). This is rare in the previous history. In imperial Chinese cities, most streets were poorly paved (see Figure 4.6). Excrement, urine, garbage, waste water, dead bodies, dirt and mud coexisted with daily human activities, without being considered as unbearable or causing diseases. Since the environment was already messy and unclean, street vendors' garbage was not seen as much of a problem (Xu, 2015) because it did not contravene the overall environmental order. The messy and dirty streets became problematic only after China imitated Western cities' tidy and orderly cityscape. Also, the garbage piling up in the street was not considered as a threat to public health in history, because Chinese medicine did not explain disease causation by bacteria but by the disharmony of *yin* and *yang*. It was after the introduction of Western hygienic science, especially the Pasteurian germ theory, that diseases were attributed to garbage and its odour. Thus, the image of street vendors was associated with dirtiness under the gaze from Western hygienic knowledge.

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<sup>30</sup> The police administration of sanitation and public health was also paralleled in Japan (Chuumu, 2011) and Europe (Foucault, 2007, pp. 86, 87).



Figure 4.6 Street scene in Beijing, circa 1879 (from the Cornell University Archives) <sup>31</sup>

*Shirong* and *weisheng* respectively represented China's pursuit of visual and hygienic order following the Western models. These Western knowledge, when practised in Chinese cities, imposed a new set of order in urban environment, and it was under these modern orders that the dirty image of street vendors was produced. As Mary Douglas (2003, p. 2) points out, 'dirt is essentially disorder'. Dirt is not dirty in itself, but 'the by-product of systematic ordering and classification of matter'; it becomes dirty when it contravenes the ordered relations of the environment (Douglas, 2003, p. 36). Therefore, the elimination of dirt 'is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment' (Douglas, 2003, p. 2). Such organising effort is especially prevalent in the modern era. As Bauman's notes, the project of modernity is essentially an order-aimed 'social-engineering'. It 'views the society as an object of administration' or 'a garden to be designed and kept in the planned shape by force' (Bauman, 1989, p. 18). In this sense, the exclusion of street vendors in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was intrinsically a modern deed, and the marginalisation of street vending culture should be understood as a by-product of China's modernisation. For the modernising state, street vendors were like unwanted weeds that needed to be eliminated by the 'gardener' so as to establish the new modern order. Vendors were neither clean nor dirty by themselves, but gained these qualities according to whether they were 'in place' or 'out of place' in the surrounding order.

<sup>31</sup> <https://historyinphotos.blogspot.co.uk/2015/03/old-peking.html>

Their business has been operated for a thousand years, but became inappropriate only when it was placed in the modern visual and hygienic orders.

The emergence of the perceptions of street vendors' dirtiness and unsightliness may be better understood in reference to the anthropological scholarship of the 'sensual turn' (Howes, 2003). Rich findings in this field have revealed the cultural constructed dimension of human sensation (Corbin, 1995; Herzfeld 2001; Smith, 2007; Stoller, 2010). That is, the sensuous experience, although often felt as natural and objective, is in part produced and shaped by sociocultural environment and historical process. Shuenn-Der Yu (2015) argues that the perceptions of cleanliness, tidiness, comfort and disgust are 'sensuous habitus' acquired through enculturation (pp. 12, 110). Habitus, as proposed by Bourdieu, is the habits, skills, and dispositions that are ingrained in our body through our life experiences (Wacquant, 2005). Sensuous habitus, likewise, is the sensuous experiences that are ingrained in people's everyday perception through habituation. The import<sup>32</sup> of Western concepts of hygiene/sanitation and city appearance into China not only transformed its urban landscape, but firstly reshaped its cultural perception of 'what is beautiful', 'what is clean' and, more generally, the understanding of 'what is proper'. Street vending used to be accepted, and sometimes praised as a positive thing in the past, but became dirty and unsightly in the modern urban landscape. This history exemplifies how knowledge constructed sensual experiences. What followed this stigma of street vendors/vending, was the emergence of social norms and government policies that exclude these improper beings.

Often, the concern of visual appearance and hygiene merged into one, because they were aimed at creating 'a different visual aesthetic: linear, smooth, and ordered' and called for the separation of 'things seen and unseen' (Rogaski, 2004, p. 193). On the one hand, the *weisheng* discourse went beyond its medical realm and engaged with 'the reconstruction of cities, ordering of society, and transforming of human beings (Rogaski, 2004, p. 303)', and eventually became 'an alternative logic for the ordering of daily existence (Rogaski, 2004, p. 104)' encompassing 'everything from the visual order of the city to the control of bacteria (Rogaski, 2004, p. 206).' On the other hand, *shirong* was also expanded and involved hygienic issue. In 1945, soon after the end of WWII, leader of China Chiang Kai-shek ordered to 'rectify *shirong*' within limited time, for the reason that 'the Nationalist and Allied army are arriving soon, and the tidiness of Shanghai's

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<sup>32</sup> The 'import' of *weisheng* concept was in fact through prolonged contestation and negotiation before it eventually became a publicly acknowledged common sense in Chinese society (S. H. Lei, 2004, 2009)

*shirong* is a matter of our international image'. This *shirong* improvement included cleaning the garbage in Shanghai's street, forbidding residents to dump waste in the street, driving away itinerant peddlers and removing vending stalls at the roadside (Shen Bao, 1945). Here, hygiene measures were launched under the name of appearance; visual arrangements merged with sanitary arrangements and became a vehicle to express national identity and national pride (Rogaski, 2004, p. 194). This use of language is continued in contemporary Chinese urban policy, which will be brought up in 5.2.3.

Whether *shirong* or *weisheng*, they were intrinsically knowledge and practices of 'ordering' that involved classification, separation and exclusion of things, bodies, and activities. Such ordering attempts are shared by European early-modern governments which aimed to reach 'the right disposition of things arranged so as to lead to a suitable end' (Foucault, 2007, p. 127). With the power of the police, the government was able to execute its will of ordering, which involved the temporal and spatial arrangements of various urban elements from materials (roads, drains, building facades, shop signs, garbage, corpses, faeces) to human activities (peddling, begging, spitting, defecating, dumping, sleeping in the street) (Duan, 2014; Rogaski, 2004, p. 177). Through the policing of these unwanted things and behaviours, the early-modern Chinese government attempted to make new urban environment that met the standards of Western aesthetic and hygienic order.

#### **4.2.5 *Wenming* and the respect of public order**

Along with the discourses of *shirong* and *weisheng*, another newly emerging powerful discourse was *wenming* (civilised/civilisation), which also shaped the official imagination of urban spaces and contributed to the stigmatisation of street vending.

Like *weisheng*, *wenming* is also a Japanese-made Chinese. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese scholars adopted the term to translate the Western concept of civilisation, mainly from the historical works by François Guizot (1896) and Henry Buckle (1857). Later in 1889, Chinese thinker *Liang Qichao* introduced the word into China in his article *Wenming Zhi Jingshen* (The Spirit of Civilisation). In Europe, the term 'civilisation' was a neologism that emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in French. Formed from verb 'civilise', the noun 'civilisation' gained a new meaning of 'advance of society' as the opposite of barbarism (Braudel & Mayne, 1995, p. 3; Mazlish, 2001, p. 23). By constructing the development gap between the West and the other, the discourse of civilisation was



absorbed into a colonial ideology that saw other nations as barbarian that should be civilised by Western culture. For example, Guizot claimed ‘..... all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belongs to the most illustrious branch of our species (Comte de Gobineau, 1915, p. 210).’ An influential concept at the time was the ‘ladder of civilization’ which, drawing upon biological evidences, ranked human races in the order of White, Yellow and Black (Comte de Gobineau, 1915, p. 27). In these writings, China was described as ‘slavery’, ‘irrational’, ‘fallen’ (Hobson, 2004, p. 225), ‘semi-civilised’ (W. E. Hall & Higgins, 1917, p. 42) or ‘barbarous humanity’ between ‘civilised humanity’ and ‘savage humanity’ (Lorimer, 1883, p. 102).

Along with colonial expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the discourse of civilisation spread to non-Western culture. The Chinese word *wenming* was chosen to translate the Western term ‘civilisation’ first by Japanese intellectual Yukichi Fukuzawa (2008/1875). Based on the Western conception of civilisation, he developed a ‘civilisation history’ that saw human history as a linear progression from uncivilised to civilised, modern Europe being the most civilised one. Decades later, when Chinese thinker Huang Zunxian (1985, p. 642) and Liang Qichao (1989b) introduced the modern meaning of *wenming* into China, they inherited its Euro-centric and social Darwinist connotation. For example, Liang Qichao introduced the ‘three-step ladder of civilisations’ from Fukuzawa (Liang, 1989b): ‘the division of human being into barbarian, semi-civilised and civilised ... is a generally acknowledged principle of evolution’. ‘In the narrow sense, Europe is indeed the mother of all civilisations in today’s world (Liang, 1989, p. 15).’ In the global order of civilisation, China lost its leading position as an ancient civilisation and fell behind the West and even the quickly-modernising Japan. The introduction of *wenming* concept by these intellectuals were out of the wish of civilising the Chinese people from backwardness and catching up with the more advanced countries. Therefore, the discourse was invested with a strong progressive connotation: ‘seeing from today, an extreme difference lies between the West and China. But in fact, it is just a matter of time instead of essential difference. ... Since the world is on the path of civilisation, all people are destined to change (Liang, 1989c).’

The term *wenming* gained extensive use since 1895 (W. Liu, 2011). Its modern meaning is twofold. While the noun form of *wenming* means ‘higher level of social development’,

its adjective use<sup>33</sup> refers to *the qualities of a developed society*, especially in terms of appropriate public behaviours, namely refinement, civility, or complying to social norms. The latter meaning was often utilised by reformist elites to criticise commoners' public behaviours (D. Wang, 2003, pp. 130–133). These criticisms were echoed by government's practical regulation on street activities through the newly established police institution. The patrolling police could investigate or even arrest anyone in the street for a wide range of improper behaviours, such as 'bizarre speech', 'unusual behaviours', 'weird clothing', 'evil and licentious talk', shouting that 'disturb the peace', begging, playing firecrackers, singing obscene folk songs, public defecation, having bath in the street, spitting, hanging out shirtless, drying clothes outdoors, and street vending (Da Gong Bao, 1903; Ren, 2014; D. Wang, 2003, pp. 131–132; see Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7 A newspaper cartoon criticising street vending as one of the uncivilised behaviours, 1929 (Ren, 2014)

Police's intervention of everyday street life marked the expansion of state power in modern era. Mark Neocleous has shown that early European policing enabled the state to manage the increasingly independent individuals and their public activities such as gambling, drinking and adultery, as well as to solve the rising concern of sanitation in town (Neocleous, 2000, pp. 2–3). As China's police system was established following the Western model, it also served as a state apparatus of social control. Moreover, the police were not just reproducing the existing order, but actually 'fabricating' a new bourgeois order through the exercise of state power (Neocleous, 2000, p. 5). Early modern China's policing was such a productive force that enabled the elites to carry out their civilising mission and impose the new order of modern traffic, city appearance,

<sup>33</sup> There are no inflectional affixes in Chinese, so the adjective form is still *wenming*.

hygiene and civilisation (D. Wang, 2003, p. 131).

Norbert Elias has noted that civilisation is a process of increasing mutual dependence between individuals that led to: first, the awareness of self-other boundary; then, an increasing threshold of shame and disgust of certain ‘uncivilised’ public manners; and eventually, the self-restraint of natural impulse in the public (Elias, 2000/1939). The Chinese discourse *wenming* involved, in a large part, a similar restraint of improper personal behaviours that might disturb public order. For instance, ‘evil and licentious talk’, singing obscene folk songs and hanging out shirtless might offend others. In other words, they failed to comply with the arising self-other boundaries. Likewise, playing firecrackers and shouting that ‘disturb the peace’ interfered the auditory public order. Public defecation and spitting were disruptive to sanitary public order. In the powerful discourse of *wenming*, these behaviours were all uncivilised (D. Wang, 2003, p. 132). Street vending was also in the list of uncivilised behaviours (Ren, 2014), for it disturbed modern traffic order (by encroaching into road space), sanitary order (by producing garbage) and business order (by operating informal economy).

In this sense, the *wenming* discourse can be understood as the China’s process of civilisation. As discussed in 4.2.2, traditional Chinese society lacked a clear concept of the ‘public’ and, if any, had an obscure demarcation between public and private (Liu & Zhang, 2003; Liang, 1989a; Fei, 1992/1947). Through the spread of *wenming* concept, a ‘public-mindedness’ that did not significantly exist before surfaced during this process (Zarrow, 2002, pp. 139-42). Promoted by elites’ admonishment (Liang, 1998/1902) and government’s coercive imposition, notably the ‘New Life Movement’ in the 1930s (see Dirlik, 1975), a respect of public order was gradually publicised to the society through the spread of *wenming* discourse. This parallels European civilisation’s expansion from the court to common people, as noted by Elias. However, *wenming* and its stress on public order were established as social norm primarily in the urban society, while the vast rural area was much less affected. As 5.4.3 will show, *wenming* is still an ongoing process in contemporary China. The habitus of *wenming* is still spreading from urban to rural society, and is still stressed and regulated by the authorities, just like a century ago.

The rise of public awareness not only involved personal behaviours, but also included ‘the creation of public institutions, such as ... the provision and organisation of militia for guarding crops or patrolling streets, the building and maintenance of bridges and paths...’ (Feuchtwang, 2012, p. 5). The state, as the representative of the ‘public’, took

on the responsibility for providing public good and maintaining public order. Meanwhile, the state was legitimatised to intervene into the traditionally autonomous street space because it embodied a mighty ‘public’ over the ‘private’<sup>34</sup>. As such, the rising of public awareness in *wenming* discourse contributed to the marginalisation of street vending in two ways: on the one hand, vendors were constructed by the authorities and the media as troublemakers who disturbed the public traffic/sanitary/visual order; on the other hand, the state was legitimatised to remove these public nuisances.

To be sure, *wenming* was not the first expression in Chinese language to refer to ‘public order’. The reason why the term was widely adopted in early modern era was that it distinctively combined a social Darwinist progressiveness with the respect of public order. When imbued with a sense of social progressivism, *wenming* became a powerful moral normality by which one could be accused as backward or not progressive when he/she disturbed public order (S. Yu, 2015, p. 112). In both senses of *wenming*, street vendors were problematised. On the one hand, their appropriation of road spaces disturbed public order, especially traffic order. On the other hand, as *wenming* embraced the progressive and the modern, traditional street vendors became an obsolete existence, a shameful mark of the nation’s backward past that were urgently needed to be erased. In 5.4.2, we will see that the normative power of *wenming* has been exploited into contemporary China’s revanchist urbanism to justify its spatial exclusion of street vendors, just as it was a century ago.

While the elites identified themselves with civilisers of the masses, their reformation often offended commoners’ custom and brought inconveniences. Sometimes, the elites exploited blatant cultural discrimination and class prejudice on the lower, uneducated class, criticising them as ‘*bu wenming*’ (uncivilised) (D. Wang, 2003, pp. 130–133, 248). Just as the English term ‘uncivilised’, ‘*bu wenming*’ was an equally demeaning term. In a degree, the discourse of *wenming* was turned from a discourse of self-improvement to one of self-othering. It became a site where dominant and subordinate positions were reproduced inside Chinese people. Out of the worry of being excluded from the Western-led modernity, the Chinese turned to impose inner exclusion on themselves. As Arif Dirlik (1996) indicates, the expansion of Western ideological hegemony is often enabled and consolidated by the ‘self-orientalisation’ of Asian intellectuals. The Chinese intellectuals, in the wish of civilising Chinese people, set off another othering process that was once done by colonialism, and saw their own nation with a self-colonialist or

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<sup>34</sup> This echoes the conceptual level of ‘from street to road’ analysed in 4.2.2.

inner-orientalist gaze. In 7.2 we will see that this internal divide is still prevalent in contemporary Chinese society in the form of a 'rural-urban divide'.

This section outlines the historical origin of marginalisation of street vendors in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Four factors are identified as the reasons of their marginalisation: 1) modern urban planning that replaced street with road and endangered the space of street vending; 2) *weisheng* and *shirong* discourses that raised the authorities' attention on city sanitation and appearance; 3) *wenming* discourse that raised the authorities' attention on public order; 4) modern business forms that competed with vending economy. Undeniably, Western modernity exerted decisive influence on these transformations, whether through the import of Western institutions, aesthetics or discourses. A 'colonial comparison' (McFarlane, 2008) played a central role in constructing the superiority of Western modernity. As Brenda Yeoh (2003) writes, 'the contrast between magnificent European buildings and squalid Asian tenements' undeniably epitomised an asymmetrical power relation between the West and the East (p. 11). Apart from direct visual impact, discursive operations were also at play in constructing the asymmetrical power relation. As Foucault indicates, discourses provide the spaces in which statements can be made (Kendall and Wickham, 1998, p. 42), and thus both enable and limit our understanding of the social world. Moreover, discourses inevitably allocate differential rights among related agents (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 149). Although the knowledge of *weisheng*, *shirong* and *wenming* appeared to be objective and scientific, they nevertheless exported a set of 'European standards' according to which Chinese urban environment was judged. Moreover, their resultant practises, i.e. the pursuit of pristine and orderly urban environment, actually brought unequal treatments to certain groups. The eviction of street vendors was an example.

Such comparison was first drawn by Westerners, and later by Chinese themselves in an 'internal orientalist' manner. Under the comparison, the colonised cities were constantly 'grasped in the shadows of Western planning discourses' (McFarlane, 2008, p. 421). Traditional Chinese cities were problematised as less civilised, and Western urban planning, public sanitation, public order and administration were introduced as the solution to civilise the country. These projects, while making the new 'modern' Chinese cities, also uprooted traditional urban life and traditional occupations, including street vending. In the new modern environment, vendors peddling or setting up stands along the street became 'improper' and 'out of place'. In the following chapters, we will see how these historical factors continued to exist and were translated into the

contemporary exclusionary urbanism.

# Chapter 5 Revanchist Urbanism in Contemporary China

## 5.1 Street vending in the Socialist period (1950s – 1970s)

In the early years of the newly founded People's Republic of China, the chaotic economy order and the absence of government regulation gave rise to the thriving of street vending. There were estimated 4 million vendors in Chinese cities, which made up 64% of the nation's turnover of private economy and a quarter of the country's retail commodity circulation, and served as the main source of vegetable and meat in some areas (S. Zhang, 2004; Q. Lin, 1958). However, the Socialist ideology saw street vending as well as any private ownership as a kind of 'petty bourgeois', which is reactionary and should be replaced by the state's planned distribution system. Since 1954, the state started to practice monopoly for purchase and marketing of daily necessities, 'redeem' large private business, and transform petty private business by organising them into cooperatives groups or incorporating them into state own enterprises. Street vendors were considered as 'speculator', 'capitalist tails', 'not belonging to socialist component', and forced to be absorbed into the state economy system (Q. Lin, 1958). In the Socialist Transformation Movement in 1956, the majority of private owned economy was transformed into public economy, and street vendors were almost eliminated in Chinese cities (J. Li, 2010; Feng & Han, 2009). As a result, people often had to travel long distances to collect food and daily necessities from the government stores, which were the only source of daily supplies (Meisner, 1999, p. 454).

During the Socialist period, the state control of local society was 'far beyond the Republican period' and reached every corner of social life (Hua, 2000, p. 86). In the cities, the lives of residents were tightly bound to and confined in the *danwei* (socialist working unit) system and regulated by the street-level administrative system of Residents' Committee (*juwei hui*) and a network of Street Office (*jiedao ban*) (Bray, 2005, pp. 110–111; Xia, 2008). Supplies of food and daily necessities were under state monopoly and accessible only from the state-run stores. A *hukou* system, i.e. household registration system, was established since 1958 as a tool for population control. The system tightly restricted population movement between rural and urban areas (Chan & Zhang, 1999; Xia, 2008), and thereby cut the path of nearby villagers entering city to trade. During the Socialist years, 'the streets of China were relatively clean and pure,

pretty much devoid of observable economic behavior... shops of any sort were few and rare' (Solinger, 2013, p. 7).

Notably, although the strict state control left almost no place for street vending, exceptions existed. The early 1960s went through a short-lived permission of petty trading, Considerable number of vendors resurfaced in the street, yet eradicated again only a year later because of Mao Zedong's fear of returning to capitalism (Solinger, 2013, p. 7). Besides, literature indicates that there still existed a certain number of 'quasi-vendors' who only belonged to cooperatives in name but privately engaged in circulation of goods. Because of its effective supplementary role in the state-run economy, these illegal private commerce activities won tacit consent of elite cadres (Meisner, 1999, p. 85; Feng & Han, 2009; Solinger, 1987).

## **5.2 Ideological and discursive turns in the 1980s**

Since the neoliberal reform in 1978, the country started to shake off the planned economy system and the socialist ideology of 'class struggle'. These transformations gave rise to new social ethos, public discourses and urban policies, which, looking from today, bred the revanchist discourses in the 1990s. Hence, dwelling on the 1980s leads us to better understand the root of contemporary urbanism.

### **5.2.1 Revival of street vending in post-reform Chinese cities**

After 1978, the Reform and Opening activated the neoliberal turn of the country from Maoist revolutionary ideology and retargeted the country's primary task at economic construction. In order to mobilise multiple modes of economies, the state loosened control on local level society, deregulated privately owned economy, and allowed peasants to enter city for urban jobs. These policies opened the opportunity for rural-urban migrants to sell agricultural products, which made up the early street vending in post-reform Chinese cities (Bannan, 1992). Later in the 1990s, when the liberalising reform of state-owned enterprises caused widespread unemployment, urban unemployed population became another contributor of the army of street vendor (Sun & Dai, 2009, p. 166; Solinger, 2013). Among the reviving private entrepreneurs in early post-reform years, street vendors were one of the earliest pioneers. Migrants from the vast rural area, pushing carts or carrying poles, went on the streets of cities to sell various daily necessities, vegetable, cooked food or engaging in services such as repairing or hairdressing. The largely underdeveloped urban retail system provided plenty of opportunities for the over 100 million migrants to earn livelihoods as



self-employed informal petty traders (Bell & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014).

By the early 1980s, unregistered street traders have ‘reached rather staggering proportions in some cities’ (Solinger, 1993, p. 70). City streets were quickly transformed by these street entrepreneurs (Meisner, 1999, pp. 454–455). Peddlers graced the streets in force. In many cities, the gathering vendors formed urban fairs, which became an important retailing outlet for urban residents (Sit, 1987). Managing to earn a living and even to get rich through self-employed economic activities, street vendors greatly enlivened Chinese urban economy. This phenomenon was praised by Western media who often contrasted it with the austere urban life in Maoist China. Throughout the 80s, street vending remained largely unregulated and was sometimes promoted by the local authorities because it was seen as a means of supplementing urban retailing system and easing urban unemployment (Li, J, 2010; Meisner, 1999, pp. 454–455; Sit, 1987).

The revival of street vending was not merely because of economic reason, but also because street trading had become part of the collective memory of Chinese urban dwellers (J. Zhong, 2014) and the popular culture of Chinese city (J. Hu, 2012). Although exterminated under the Socialist regime, the culture of street vending has never died in people’s mind. Such a tenacious tradition enabled street vending to be revived soon after the prohibition was loosened in the 1980s. Meanwhile, the tradition also endowed street vending with a cultural legitimacy, which has been adopted widely in the discursive contestations against government’s eviction of vendors (see 5.5.1).

### **5.2.2 Revival of the discourse of *wenming***

In the 1980s, although the government did not practically ban street vending, there emerged some changes in the discursive realm that prepared for the revanchist urbanism in the 90s. As the state intended to steer the nation’s ideology from the Maoist ‘philosophy of struggle’ to a new social ethos of development, the nationwide movement of ‘five stresses, four beauties and three loves’ (*wu jiang si mei san reai*, hereinafter referred to as ‘*wu jiang si mei*’ for short) was launched. The movement called for the rectification of social order, the refinement of individual behaviour, and the rebuilding of patriotism. Commentary pointed out that the movement was adopted by the state as a means to adjust Chinese society from the chaos left by the Cultural Revolution and to create an environment conducive to the realisation of ‘the four modernisations’ (Murthy, 1983, p. 3). As the counterpart of economic ‘four modernisations’ (modernisation of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science

and technology), *wujiang simei* served as the cultural and social dimension of the state's modernisation project, which aimed at 'cultivating socialist new man' with 'ideals, morality, culture and discipline to meet the needs of socialist modernisation and enhance the moral and cultural qualities of the whole Chinese nation (Renmin Ribao, 1983)'.

The central task of movement was to popularise of the aphorisms of 'five stresses, four beauties and three loves':

*The stress of wenming, of manners, of weisheng, of order and of morals;*

*The beauty in mind, in language, in behaviour and in environment;*

*The love of nation, of socialism and the Party.*

As the first item of the *wujiang simei* slogan, *wenming* was the core of the whole set of values advocated in the movement. The state claimed that *wujiang simei* was an 'educational form to realise the goal of *wenming*'<sup>35</sup>. The goal of building the 'two *wenmings*' – spiritual (*jingshen*) *wenming* and material (*wuzhi*) *wenming* – since proposed in 1979, constituted the core of Deng Xiaoping's<sup>36</sup> ideological framework. *Wujiang simei* was enacted as the primary means of building the 'spiritual *wenming*'. While material *wenming* referred to economic development, spiritual *wenming* aimed at creating and reinforcing a set of social norms such as hard work, politeness, discipline and patriotism in order to adapt minds to the new mindsets and socio-economic practices derived from the neoliberal economic reform (Boutonnet, 2011, p. 80-81). As 4.2.5 shows, the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century discourse of *wenming* was centred on the stress of public order. Through the *wujiang simei* movement, this stress was significantly revived in the post-reform public discourse and put in a central position, because it echoed the post-reform government's need of stabilising the chaotic society.

The phrase '*wenming*' was adopted extensively by both official propaganda and mass media. Although spiritual and material *wenming* were raised as parallel concepts, spiritual *wenming* gained much more importance in its further development, especially after being reemphasised in 1986 (G. Li, 2006, p. 244). The term 'building spiritual civilisation' was stressed over and over in various government reports, and became a political task appointed to local governments in every city, town and village. Various

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<sup>35</sup> <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/GB/242358/242911/17766222.html>

<sup>36</sup> Deng Xiaoping is the leader of China in the 80s-90s.

*wenming* titles, such as ‘civilised factory’, ‘civilised shop’, ‘civilised city’, ‘civilised village’, ‘civilised unit’, ‘civilised street’ were issued by the state as official commendations of social organisations and administrative units. Moreover, the ‘Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilisation’ was established as an important ideological steering body of the state’s propaganda system, performing the duty of educating the masses and shaping public values (Shambaugh, 2007).

*Wenming*/civilisation continued to play a central role in official propaganda in the 1990s. ‘Civilised citizens’ were erected by national propaganda as models who were patriotic, dedicated to profession, obey the law, kind-hearted, polite and civilised in manners. The household or work units that were considered complying to these codes were officially honoured by a ‘civilised household’ or ‘civilised unit’ award (Dydon, 2008). *Wenming*-related advertisements with moral suasion were displayed extensively in every city, to the degree that they became part of the urban landscape. This is still the situation today. A Taiwanese newspaper article commented ‘in the street of mainland China, the most common slogan is *wenming*’ (W. Chen, 2015). A major reason why the state strongly pushed the civilised/*wenming* value was to ‘mask the division of society between lower and higher classes, poor and rich, exploited and exploiter’ (Boutonnet, 2011, p. 90). The 1990s was the time when China underwent dramatic transformation from planned economy to market economy and faced serious social unemployment and inequality. The models of the ‘civilised’ were erected at the time as a device to normalise and unify the heterogeneous urban population, standardise their minds and bodies, and to ease the tension and hostility in urban society by stressing a shared public order and social norm. Meanwhile, the revived *wenming* discourse was absorbed into the emerging revanchist ideology (see 5.3) to provide legitimacy for its coercive evictions of subordinated groups.

### **5.2.3 Revival of the discourses of *shirong* and *weisheng***

Aside from *wenming*, *wujiang simei* movement also stressed *shirong* (‘the beauty in environment’) and *weisheng* (stress of hygiene) in order to rectify what was considered the dirty and disordered urban environment (*zang, luan, cha*) handed down from the Cultural Revolution. As 4.2.2 shows, these two discourses played a central role in the emergence of anti-vending ideology in early-20<sup>th</sup> century. The *wujiang simei* movement greatly publicised the awareness of *shirong* (city appearance) and *weisheng* (hygiene) in China’s post-reform discursive sphere. Since the mid-80s, the media started to criticise China’s unsatisfactory urban environment (Dong, 1985), journals specialising on city

image issues, such as *China City Appearance* (*Zhongguo Shirong Bao*), *City Image Construction* (*Shirong Jianshe Bao*) were launched, early city appearance campaigns appeared, such as Shanghai's 'Double Forbiddances' (*Liang Jin*, forbiddance on littering and spitting). In 1986, the central government issued the *Standard of City Appearance* (*Chengshi Rongmao Biaozhun*), which involved the uniform design of urban architecture, signs, advertisements, the cleanness and order of public space and the tidiness and smoothness of urban roads, etc.

In the Socialist period, the early-modern discourse of *weisheng* was carried on through the 'Patriotic Hygiene Campaign' (*Aiguo Weisheng Yundong*). The Socialist propaganda of *weisheng* imbued it with strong patriotic values, but also took out its *shirong*-related connotations<sup>37</sup> and narrowed it to primarily the prevention of epidemics (Rogaski, 2004, Ch. 10). However, the campaign was interrupted during the Cultural Revolution (Xiao, 2005). In the post-reform era, the meaning of *weisheng* has shaken off much of its patriotic meaning (although the sanitation work is still under the charge of Patriotic Hygienic Office) and was broadened again to encompass the comprehensive visual order of urban landscape, and thus merged again with *shirong*. For example, Guangdong province's 'Sanitation Management Regulation' in 1981 (Standing Committee of Guangdong People's Congress, 1981) mainly dealt with sanitation (*weisheng*) problems, its aim being 'to maintain urban sanitation, protect citizen's health, and build neat, hygienic, civilised city' (Clause 1). But when Guangzhou issued its municipal regulation in 1986 (Standing Committee of Guangzhou People's Congress, 1986), visual image became the primary concern, and its aim became 'building Guangzhou into a beautiful, neat, civilised socialist modern city' (Clause 1). This shift of focus was also reflected in the name of regulations. The provincial regulation in 1981 was simply 'Regulation on Sanitation (*weisheng*) Management', while the municipal regulation in 1986 was named 'Regulation on City Appearance (*shirong*) and Environmental Sanitation (*weisheng*)', *shirong* being added ahead of *weisheng*. The national 'Regulation on city image and sanitation' issued by the State Council in 1992 also used *shirong* and *weisheng* together (State Council of China, 1992). These discursive evolutions reflected government's increasing stress on the visual order of urban environment.

Take Guangzhou city for example. In Guangzhou's *Regulation on City Image and Sanitation* (Guangzhou People's Government, 1986), 'neatness and beauty' (*zhengjie meiguan*) were mentioned repeatedly, which involved the pursuit of visual decency and

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<sup>37</sup> the discourses of *shirong* and *weisheng* used to be mingled together, see 4.2.2

order of public space such as building facade, street, and open-air market. Many clauses stipulated that advertisements, slogans, shop signs should be posted in designated place, and 'kept neat and beautiful' (Clause 7); road signs, telegraph poles, bus stations should be 'uniform in style' (Clause 9). Other specific requirements for urban landscape maintenance included:

*Roadside units, households and shops should not stack objects in front of doors; sun umbrella must be kept in good condition and neat and beautiful (Clause 10).*

*Road, sidewalks, lanes and back alleys should be cleaned by professional cleaners every morning and kept clean (Clause 22, 23).*

*Sanitation department should set up bins at roadside, plaza and other public places... and keep them in good condition and clean (Clause 38).*

Through arranging various urban elements from advertisements and shop signs to garbage and dirt, the detailed regulations attempted to create a pristine visual order. Under this ordering of urban space, the unregulated itinerant vendors who produced garbage and blocked sidewalks were seen as a violation to the classification code and a damage to the neatness and cleanness. As a result, Clause 11 of the 1986 regulation ruled 'any units or individuals are forbidden to appropriate road and sidewalk to stack object, set up stall, or park car. Special requirement of road appropriation needs to apply for permission.' Although it formally affirmed the illegality of street vending in Guangzhou, street vendors were not eradicated in practice, because they were deemed as contributors to economic development (as told by chengguan officer Mr. Xu). It was in the 1990s when the making of city image became increasingly important that the regulation was strictly implemented. However, the 1986 regulation provided the legal basis of more city appearance and sanitation policies in the 90s (see 5.3.2.2).

Through the vigorous national movement of *wujiang simei*, the early-modern discourses of *wenming*, *weisheng* and *shirong* were revived. As 5.3.2 will show, these values are inherited in the contemporary urban policies. Moreover, the governing body of *wujiang simei* movement, the 'Five Stresses, Four Beauties and Three Loves Office' (*Wujiang Simei Sanreai Bangongshi*), was later developed into the Chengguan Bureau, the agency of today's revanchist exclusion (Yan, 2012). Hence, the *wujiang simei* movement in the

80s actually heralded today's revanchist urbanism.

The modern concepts of *wenming*, *weisheng* and *shirong* bear clear continuities with their early-modern predecessors, but were also imbued with new meanings. For example, the core of *wenming* was still the respect and maintenance of public order, but it was added with socialist ideologies and patriotism, and its early-modern meaning 'Western lifestyle' was lost. For *weisheng*, it is more involved with the visual image of city than simply fighting against the germs in the Socialist period. In fact, *wenming* in its further development became 'an umbrella term which covers subjects as diverse as enriching the communist ideology, observing sanitation rules and etiquette, and being refined in speech' (Murthy, 1983, p. 4). For instance, Beijing's *Citizen's Charter of Wenming* included an aphorism that urged citizens to 'beautify *shirong* and pay attention to *weisheng*'. This case reveals to us the interconnection between the triple discourses of *wenming*, *weisheng* and *shirong*. Seeing from today, the revival of these three discourses in the 1980s serves as a discursive and legal preparation for the revanchist urbanism since the 1990s. The following sections will demonstrate how these discourses were utilised in the official anti-vending ideology in order to justify the exclusion of street vendors.

### **5.3 The formation of revanchist urbanism since the 1990s**

#### **5.3.1 Devolution, entrepreneurial government and revanchist urbanism**

Since the 1990s, China's market economy reform profoundly influenced various aspects of the society, among which urban development was at the forefront. Due to the devolution of central power, especially the fiscal decentralisation, the locus of development shifted from the centre state to local city level, and the mode of development shifted 'from state-led industrialization to a more urban-based accumulation' (F. Wu, 2008, p. 1094). Under this urban-based accumulation regime, the local authorities had to create proactive local development strategies that mobilise resources and compete for external investments independently, rather than passively carrying out central policy like before (S. He & Wu, 2009). As such, China's post-reform local government is described as 'entrepreneurial government' (Duckett, 2001), and is deemed as part of the global trend of 'entrepreneurial city' in the last two decades (F. Wu, 2003). Among all the urban development approaches, land market development was the leading thrust. Since the City Planning Act in 1989 empowered local governments to make their own urban plans and to issue land-leasing certificates to developers through bidding and auction, land market became a new revenue of local fiscal income – for many cities the most important one (Ding, 2007). In this way, urban

lands were translated into commodity for local governments.

It has been observed around the world that the commodification of urban space has caused a sharpening of social inequalities and social exclusion of certain marginal groups in the last two decades. This phenomenon is framed by Neil Smith (1996) as 'revanchist city', which refers to the vengeful neoliberal urban policies that seek to recapture the urban areas 'stolen' by the urban poor and marginal groups and rebuild bourgeois order in public space. Revanchist urbanism perceives the poor and marginal groups as the 'enemies within' and the threats to quality of urban life for the moral majority (Smith, 1998, p. 3,4). Under the name of 'urban renewal' or 'downtown revitalisation', marginal groups such as ethnic minority, beggar, immigrants or sex workers are excluded from central urban spaces by strict punitive policies and replaced by new investment projects that cater for elite aesthetics, such as gated communities, shopping malls, office buildings, convention centres, leisure districts and tourist sites. These revitalisation projects involve a 'reaestheticization' (MacLeod, 2002, p. 611) that revisions the city 'as landscape rather than public space' and 'raises a politics of aesthetics above the politics of survival' (Mitchell, 1997, p. 324, 325). During China's commodification of urban land since the 1990s, a similar revanchist urbanism can also be spotted. Aesthetics-oriented development projects and state-led programmes that seek to produce high-end and orderly urban spaces gave rise to increasing spatial exclusion of the undesirables, including street vendors. The following sections will illustrate how this trend unfolded.

### **5.3.2 Motivations of China's revanchist urbanism**

#### **5.3.2.1 City appearance as a neoliberal urban strategy**

In China's neoliberal urban development in the 1990s, the discourse of city appearance (*shirong*) was absorbed into and reinforced by the entrepreneurial urban development. The making of attractive urban environment was enacted by local officials as a means to boost local economy, especially to attract global investment (K. Yu & Padua, 2007). The media publicised the importance of beautiful cityscape with the reason of providing better investment environment and attracting more tourists (X. Shi, 2001). Often, the official imagination of 'beautiful' was a Western taste. Chinese mayors saw Western cities as models and demanded local design institutes and construction bureaus to mimic their designs, such as the pristine city appearance in Singapore, grand avenues in Paris, sculptures and Baroque architectures in Rome, residential development in Orange County, California, street lighting and store lighting in Las Vegas and the White House

in Washington DC (K. Yu & Padua, 2007). Such pursuit of global aesthetics was reflected in the eager of building ‘international metropolis’ among urban governments’. The slogan of ‘build international city’ appeared in many cities’ official development strategies throughout the 90s, replacing ‘industrial development’ which used to be the central strategy in the Socialist period. For example, in 1988, Dalian raised the slogan ‘Build Dalian into an open, attractive commercial and financial centre and modernised international city’, and later claimed to ‘build Dalian into the Northern Hong Kong’. In 1992, the Chinese President proposed to ‘build Shanghai into one of the international economic, financial and commercial centres’. In the same year, Guangzhou claimed to ‘catch up with Four Asian Tigers within 15 years and build Guangzhou into a modernised international metropolis’. Accordingly, in 2004, there were nearly 200 Chinese cities who claimed to build ‘international metropolis’ (Yang, 2006). This ‘international city craze’ (Wong, 2015, p. 24) reflected Chinese political leaders’ globalising efforts which sought to earn international visibility and influence, as well as to attract global investments. As the concept ‘international metropolis’ involved a city’s comprehensive quality, it required Chinese cities to join the global order not only economically, but also in terms of city image, cultural influence, and quality of citizens. Notably, these efforts are not new, but have roots in the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century colonial comparative discourses that contrasts Chinese urban environment with ‘European standards’ (see 4.2.4).

Whether to attract capital investment or to build international metropolis, the improvement of urban environment was in a central place of municipalities’ urban strategies. For example, Guangzhou’s rapid economic development in the 1980s and 90s was accompanied by massive influx of population, construction projects all around the city, air pollution and lack of sanitation work. Its dirty and disordered cityscape was widely criticised (Gan, Zhang, & Dong, 2002; Yao, Huang, & Xie, 2000). To change this image, the municipal government launched the ‘three changes’ project in 1998 which promised to bring to urban environment ‘a small change every year, a medium change every 3 years, and a big change in the tenth year’. This project invested heavily on urban environment improvement, urban renewal and urban administration, including a series of displacements of street vendors, beggars and vagabonds. When Renmin Ribao, the Party’s official newspaper, gave affirmation to this project, it specifically mentioned its success in dealing with the serious street vending problem (Renmin Ribao, 2002).

For another example, on the eve of Hong Kong’s return to China in 1997, its bordering



city Shenzhen issued the regulation *Rectify City Appearance to Welcome Hongkong's Return in 1997* that aimed to 'improve the construction of two civilisations (material and spiritual), welcome Hongkong's return with tidy, beautiful, civilised and comfortable urban environment'. Specifically, it ordered relevant departments to 'clear up beggars, flower girls, street car cleaners, rag pickers and street vendors' (Shenzhen Municipal People's Government, 1996). An article wrote that with the return of Hong Kong, Shenzhen:

*will become the focus of the world, the hot spot for domestic and international investors and tourists. ... Therefore, rectifying cityscape is a necessity of building Shenzhen as an international city (Rectify City Appearance, Welcome the Return of Hongkong, 1997).*

Such narrative linking the pursuit of local development with city appearance is typical for revanchist urbanism. As Atkinson (2003) notes, a central aspect of revanchist city is 'the connection between urban economic development and the need to secure capital investment ... by beautifying and securing city spaces in order to market the quality of living in such locations (p. 1833)'. This narrative lasted beyond the 1990s well into today. For example, Shenzhen municipality issued a regulation in 2014 on 'further strengthening the construction of first-class international urban environment, in order to quicken the building of advanced international city' (Shenzhen Municipal Committee & Shenzhen Municipal People's Government, 2014). The regulation required 'building new landscape of an international garden city to improve Shenzhen's new image on the basis of the principal of beauty, exquisiteness and elegance' (Clause 3.1.1), and specifically stipulated to 'make streetscape tidy and ordered, ... strictly prohibit illegal activities that affect city appearance and order such as self-construction, street vending and posting' (3.1.2). Shanghai government, in order to 'display Shanghai's image of an international metropolis' during the G20 summit, also issued its City Appearance Bureau to strengthen city appearance management, which included regulating street vending (Shanghai Greening and City Appearance Bureau, 2016).

#### **5.3.2.2 State-led city campaigns**

Local governments' city appearance projects were echoed by the state. In 1992, the central government launched *Regulations on City Appearance and Sanitation*, which required urban governments to put city appearance and sanitation into their development plans and systematically specified details of city appearance task. The

regulation served as a guideline of local governments' appearance regulations, and is still in use today. Additionally, the campaign of National Sanitary City (NSC) and National Civilised City (NCC) launched respectively in 1989 and 2005 successfully mobilised the local authorities' city beautification projects. As Chapter 6 will show, the quotidian urban governance usually leaves some space for vendors. It is during the two urban campaigns and mega events that vendors are strictly evicted. Therefore, these campaigns are worth scrutinising, for they are the main forces that drive government's eviction practices.

Run by the Patriotic Hygiene Committee, the NSC is an extension of the Patriotic Hygiene Movement in the Socialist period. The selection of NSC involves assessment of construction of medical resource, health education, sanitary quality, city appearance and environmental protection (National Patriotic Hygiene Movement Committee, 2014). In terms of 'city appearance', items include 'City roads and streets should be kept smooth, paved and tidy. Main roads should be kept away from posting, scribble, vending stalls, and the behaviour of littering and spitting (Clause 9)'. 'Neighbourhood should keep roads smooth, trees in good conditions, no illegal building and no roadside businesses (Clause 15)'. 'Itinerant food vendors should be under uniform management. Their business should be limited within certain area, and within certain kinds of good (Clause 26)'. That is to say, the concept of *weisheng* (sanitation/hygiene) has gone beyond its medical sense and expanded to encompass a series of order involving architecture, object, people and behaviour.

The NSC is one of the many honorary titles granted by the state to a city, other titles including 'National Famous Historical and Cultural Cities', 'National Outstanding Tourism City', 'National Garden Cities' etc. The NCC, however, is the highest honour among all city honours (Du & Guo, 2014). The campaign was launched by the central government every three years since 2005. Defined as 'the comprehensive honour reflecting a city's overall degree of civilisation', the NCC campaign involves a broad range of assessments including government work, economic growth, infrastructure construction, social order, environment quality, quality (*suzhi*) of citizens, etc. In the assessment system, item III-78 ('Appearance of major roads and areas') requires 'no illegal roadside business', which means the existence of street vendors directly affects the competition of NCC.

In China's political system, city mayors are not elected by the residents, but appointed by

the higher-level government. For higher-level governments, ‘political accomplishment’ (*zhengji*) serves as a crucial point reference in their appointments of local political leaders. As a result, local leaders’ attempts of scoring as much as possible political points often determine the orientation of local policies (Ni, 2007). Thus, although the Chinese ‘revanchist urbanism’ also involve social cleansing against marginal groups, its political-driven characteristic significantly differentiates it from the Western ones. Public space in Chinese city is not only the venue of capitalist reproduction, but also ‘linked to ideas of political weight such as “spiritual civilisation” and “harmonious society” that reflect the reforms’ success and with that the legitimacy of the communist party and its members (Flock and Breitung, 2016, p. 166-167)’. Hence, the contemporary eviction of vendors in public space is not only based on the neoliberal local development strategy, but also pushed by state-led political assessments. Instead of purely pursuing local economic growth, the national NSC and NCC are also important indicators of local political accomplishment. Enhancing city appearance and evicting informal street vendors not only make the city more attractive for external investment, but also benefits the political careers of local officials (Zeng & Pang, 2015). A recent research indicates that the acquisition of the NCC title correlates with the promotion of municipal party secretary (Nan, 2016). In Guangzhou’s case, the success of NCC campaign was a factor in the annual career examinations of Guangzhou’s political leadership (Standing Committee of the People’s Congress of Guangdong Province, 2008). Rather than issuing direct administrative order in the socialist period, it is through this reward mechanism that the post-reform state indirectly pushes its will in a local scale. Motivated by the incentive of political career, Chinese local leaders have attached great importance to these campaigns and made extensive efforts and resources. In the name of *wenming* and *weisheng*, these campaigns are making the new Chinese cities, and the street vendors are explicitly excluded from government’s vision.

## **5.4 Practising revanchist urbanism in Chinese cities**

### **5.4.1 Chengguan’s crackdown on street vendors**

Since street vending is expressly forbidden in the assessment of NSC and NCC, the local authorities often carry out strict crackdowns on them on the eve of the campaigns in order to prepare for national inspections. For example, Hefei government claimed to create ‘vendors-free city’ in order to compete for the NCC (J. Wang, 2008; Yang, 2006). The actions are not only targeted on food vendors who produce garbage, but also on other services such as bike repair stalls, shoe repair stalls and waste collecting stalls, which bring inconveniences to nearby residents (Chen, 2014).

These exclusionary policies bring an increasing need of urban administration and law enforcement. In the 80s, urban administration and law enforcement were chaotically carried out by various departments which often overlapped or conflicted with each other. In order to carry out effective administration, the Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau (*Chengguan*) was established by every Chinese city government since 1997. Chengguan is a para-police agency that is tasked with enforcing non-criminal urban administrative regulations. It is designed to concentrate the law enforcement power from various departments such as Environment and Sanitation Bureau, Urban Planning Bureau, Industrial and Commercial Administrative Bureau to a single agency, so as to replace the chaotic and inefficient administrative structure. Such wide range of functions makes chengguan similar to the early Chinese police, who also had comprehensive administration power on urban life (see 4.2.2).

With the force of chengguan, municipality is able to exercise its will of ordering and purifying public space. The comprehensive law enforcement power of Chengguan Bureau includes the displacement of marginal groups (beggars, vendors, street artists and the homeless), the demolition of illegal or old houses, and the killing of unregistered pets, etc. Their coercive and sometimes bullying enforcement of chengguan officers soon earned them a negative reputation, especially the violent clamp down on vendors (Human Rights Watch, 2012; Kan, 2016). The violent and sometimes deadly conflicts between chengguan officers and vendors appear frequently on the media (Boehler, 2013; L. Zhou & Yu, 2013). In 2014, photographer Dai Xiang exhibited a work 'New Qingming Shanghe Tu'. Based on the framework of Qingming Shanghe Tu in the Song dynasty (see 4.1.1), he swapped the original contents for common scenes and events in modern-day Chinese cities, including a scene of chengguan bullying street vendors (see Figure 5.1).



*Figure 5.1 A section of Dai Xiang's photography work (the same part as Figure 4.1). Note the street vendors appropriating the bridge and the chengguan officers hitting vendors (marked in red circle).*

I learned about chengguan officers' daily work through interviews in Guangzhou Chengguan Bureau. Every day from 8 am to 9 pm, chengguan officers drive cars to carry out regular patrols. Their duties range 'from removing clothes hanging in public space to reminding shops to fix their loose ad sign'. Chengguan officer Mr. Chen told me that in recent years, many cities started 'Grid Management', which means dividing urban spaces into different levels of grids and allocating each grid with suitable chengguan officer groups according to the area's specific problems. Through 4 levels of spatial division – city, district, street and neighbourhood – it is hoped that the administration could be 'precise, prompt and efficient'. Sometimes, chengguan forces also work together with other forces to tackle serious problems. Once in 2013, Guangzhou Chengguan Bureau was joint by the police, making up a total of more than 200 officers, to carry out a sudden inspection on the proliferating street vendors in Shangxiajiu area.

In practice, the degree of chengguan's administration is differentiated in different periods. Their law enforcement is significantly strengthened before and during mega-events or NSC and NCC inspections. For example, Beijing carried out strict citywide social cleansing operation to erase undesirable groups like beggars, vendors and homeless before the 2008 Olympic Games (Watts, 2008). Similarly, Guangzhou, in preparation of the 2010 Asian Games, launched 'the biggest beautification project in history' so as to display its charming cityscape to the world (X. Huang, 2010). Actions included renovating building facades and painting them with uniform colours, strengthening urban sanitation, cleaning rivers, clearing beggars and vagrants (Chu, 2010) as well as eliminating street vending in the central urban area (L. Hu, 2010; Flock and Breitung, 2016). The mayor of Guangzhou indicated that hosting the Asian Games was 'a big impetus for building Guangzhou into an international metropolis', and 'has great impact on enhancing our city image, improving investment environment, boosting local economy and creating new jobs' (State Council Information Office, 2010).

The NSC and NCC campaigns successfully mobilised city beautification projects nationwide. For example, Guangzhou has been applying for the NSC title for 17 years but all failed. In 2007, the municipality made unprecedented efforts to prepare for the inspection from the superior. A detailed *Solution of Rectification Towards Creating National Sanitary City* was issued, which required comprehensive cleaning operations. The patrolling time was extended into midnight. A staff even died because of the long-term intense work (X. Wu, 2007). Such a battle finally ended up successfully gaining the NSC title. Compared to NSC, the NCC campaign was paid more attention, because it is the highest national honorary title given to a city and is counted as an important political achievement. In preparation of the NCC inspection in 2011, the then Municipal Party Secretary of Guangzhou stressed 'creating NCC is the foremost task in this year. We must succeed. Failure is not an option (B. Chen, 2011).' Considerable funds were allocated specifically to the preparation of NCC campaign (Y. Zhang, 2011). Officer Chen told me:

*In those days, we were much more strict than usual, and we were all exhausted. Our patrol started at 7 am, and went non-stop all day until 9 pm, and there were colleagues on night shift who worked till midnight. And all the holidays in that year were cancelled.*

Another chengguan officer, Mr. Feng said:

*To prepare for the NCC inspection, we have to ensure that there were not a single cigarette butt, waste paper or any garbage in the street. Street vendors were no longer just to be temporally driven away, but have to be eradicated. We stopped playing hide-and-seek with them and confiscated their carts and wares much more strictly than before. Most of them knew they can't survive that period and disappeared by themselves.*

This is confirmed by a vendor, Mr. Sun:

*During the time of creating civilised city, we all stopped selling in the street. It was too dangerous to continue business here! Many of us moved to suburbs like Luogang or Baiyun districts since the regulation there were less strict, while others found other things to do. In those days, you can hardly see any vendors in Guangzhou, at least in downtown areas.*

#### **5.4.2 Producing the 'civilised' and 'sanitary' spaces**

In a sense, the two state-led campaigns are representative of China's revanchist urbanism today. For one thing, they are central components of the administration practices; for another, the concepts behind them – *wenming* and *weisheng* – are in the centre of the official anti-vending ideology. As such, the Chinese revanchist urbanism can be understood as the production of 'civilised' and 'sanitary' spaces, because it involves the arrangement of things and the discipline of behaviours in urban space according to the norms of *wenming* and *weisheng*. While *weisheng* includes refraining from littering, spitting, urinating in the public, it is part of the broader concept of *wenming*, which involves literally any behaviours that disturb public order such as smacking lips when eating in the public, smoking in the public, talking loudly in the public, using dirty words, hanging clothes outdoor, begging, jumping queue, crossing road when the light is red, etc. (Bo, 2007; Zhao, 2004).

However, the *wenming* and *weisheng* values are essentially based on urban conditions. For migrant workers from the vast rural areas, these norms are beyond their daily experience. China is noted for its stark contrast between rural and urban areas, described by Martin Whyte (2010) as 'one country, two societies'. Research has shown that the rural/urban inequality was once higher than any other forms of inequality in China (Khan & Riskin,

1998). The gap is not only economic, but also cultural. As rural culture preserves more traditional characters from the past, it sometimes clashes with the more modernised urban society. For example, the rural environment is not built by steel and concrete, but a natural environment that purifies by itself, hence spitting and littering on the ground is normal (Mo, 2002). Also, there are no car traffic in villages, hence the rules of road crossing and traffic order are meaningless to villagers (Fei, 1992/1947, p.45). Similarly, there are no occasions that require queueing. In addition, most social interactions between country people happen outdoors, and it is necessary to yell to each other across long distance, hence it is natural for them to talk more loudly than urbanites.

As I have argued in 4.2.4 and 4.2.5, the *wenming* and *weisheng* norms are ‘sensuous habitus’ that are acquired through long-time habituation and enculturation. Habitus, as Bourdieu defines, refers to the ‘lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways’ of a group or class (Wacquant, 2005, pp. 316). As the majority of street vendors are from rural origins, they have internalised the habitus of rural society over the years. When they operate business in urban public space, some of their rural habitus become inappropriate, especially the lack of awareness of sanitation and traffic order. Moreover, habitus ‘is endowed with built-in-inertia, insofar as habitus tends to produce practices patterned after the social structures that spawned them’ (Wacquant, 2005, p. 317). This coincides with what Mr. Sun told me:

*I know throwing garbage in the street is not right, but the habit is too hard to change. In the village, littering on the ground is fine. Everyone does it.*

As our conversation continued, I saw him embarrassedly picked up the plastic bags he left on the ground. The habit of littering is so deeply ingrained in him that it is not easy to change even knowing its inappropriateness. In my fieldwork, I did notice that many vendors had the habit of littering in the public (see Figure 5.2). Notably, I found many of them were conscious of cleaning the area around their own stalls, but did not refrain from dumping garbage in other places, i.e. the ‘public’ places. This coincides with my argument in 4.2.2 that traditional street use lacked the consciousness of a public moral.





Figure 5.2 Garbage produced by vendors

Compared with littering, vendors' appropriation of street space is more required by the occupation itself, because street vending was born in traditional cities where streets were used as public space for all sorts of activities rather than merely for traffic (see 4.2.2). In modern-day cities, vendors often congregate at entrances of underground station or shopping malls, busy streets, or other places with potential customers. Figure 5.3 captures two common scenes in most Chinese cities. In the upper photo, almost the whole width of the sidewalk is occupied by food vendors, leaving only a narrow passage to walk through. The lower photo shows vendors gathering in a metro entrance, which also blocks the path. As blocking traffic disturbs public order, and the maintenance of public order is the core of *wenming* (5.2.2), street vending is marked out as 'uncivilised' (*bu wenming*). The media have criticised street vending with this term (Feng, 2015; Hong, 2017; Ma, 2017; Zhao, 2004; see Figure 5.4). A newspaper article wrote:

*During the spring festival, the flyovers carried heavy traffic of people, which also attracted many street vendors. ... Peddling in pedestrian flyovers not only blocks traffic, but also damages the wenming image of city.*

(Ma, 2017)



*Figure 5.3 Vendors appropriating sidewalk and metro entrance*



Figure 5.4 A community notice reads: ‘all shops please operate civilisedly and legally, and conform to government regulation on “no roadside business”’.

In fact, the *wenming* discourse serves as the discursive dimension of China’s revanchist urbanism. As shown in 4.2.5, the *wenming* value was imbued with certain moral implications. The consciousness of public appropriateness became a moral normality through which people are divided into the ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’, the latter being a demeaning label. Such stigmatisation of certain groups is characteristic of revanchist urbanism, which is typically ‘cloaked in the populist language of civic morality’ (Smith, 1996. p. 207). In the mainstream/official discourse, the well-accepted concept of *wenming* is incorporated into the revanchist ideology and represents the ‘prophetic and dystopian image’ (Atkinson, 2003, p. 1833) of Chinese cities as being polluted by the proliferating street vendors and in need to remove them so as to regain city appearance and public order.

With the transgressive behaviours of garbage littering and traffic blocking, vendors are widely problematised as ‘unsanitary’ (*bu weisheng*) and ‘uncivilised’ (*bu wenming*), and hence excluded by the campaigns that aim to civilise and sanitise urban spaces. However, in the practical urban administration, the imposition of *wenming* and *weisheng* norms is selectively enforced. In 2011, Guangzhou government designated in detail 82 districts and 184 roads as areas strictly prohibited areas for street vending (Guangzhou Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau Committee, 2011; red areas in Figure 5.5). These are spaces that are most visible to city landscapes, such as main arteries, plazas,



convention centres, government buildings, transportation terminals, business districts, shopping malls, commercial streets, parks and tourist attractions. Outside these areas of modern spectacles, there are many ‘unspectacular’ urban spaces such as backstreets, alleys, urban villages or peripheral suburbs where street vending is treated with more leniency, especially when there are no national inspections or mega-events. But these spaces are also less profitable and hence less attractive for vendors.

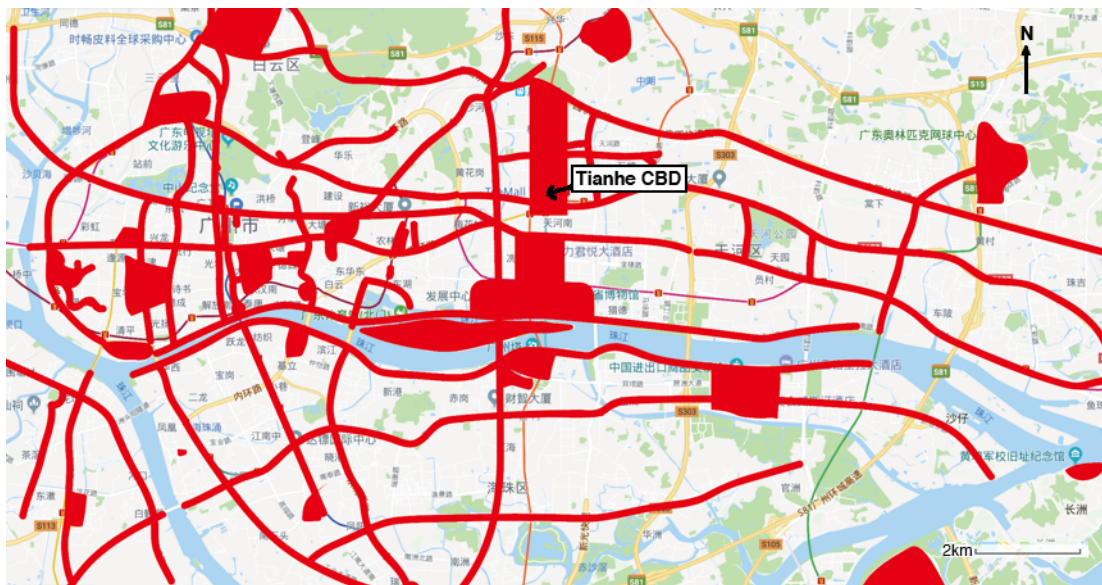


Figure 5.5 The streets and districts prohibited for street vending in Guangzhou. Tianhe CBD is the fieldwork site in Chapter 6

Chengguan officer Mr. Feng told me, ‘it’s impossible to patrol every corner of the city. Normally we just focus on (driving away street vendors in) the most crowded places. That’s where the customers go and where the vendors gather.’ In other words, the values of *wenming*, *weisheng* and *shirong* are geographically distributed only in the prime and visible spaces. Only in these spaces, the uncivilised and unclean behaviours are forbidden, so as to show the spectacle and shiny face of the city. As Thomas Boutonnet notes:

*To be wenming, cities, when required, also need to be rid of ... poverty, migrants and homeless people, to show the bright side of society only. So wenming involves a spectacle: it is about displaying, showing and staging something that is made to appear wenming.*

(Boutonnet, 2011, p. 102)

Corresponding to the prohibited areas, there are also officially authorised permitted

vending sites where street vending is legal if vendors pay the required rent (A. Luo, 2009). Although it may appear to be a sign of inclusiveness to street vending, most of these sites are located in peripheral or unpopular places that are not as profitable as the central area. As a result, the permitted vending sites policy did not change much of the situation. Many vendors still choose to do business in the city centre (Y. Liao, 2015).

Each with its own space, boundary and norms, the prohibited areas, less prohibited areas and permitted vending sites constitute the normative geographies of street vending, i.e. the 'normative mappings of human groups and behaviours' (Cresswell, 2005, p. 129) in which street vending is judged appropriate or inappropriate in different spaces. We have discussed at length about the historical formation of the Chinese *wenming* and *weisheng* concepts since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, these values are absorbed in China's revanchist urban administration and spatially practised as the normative geographies of street vending. In this sense, the 'civilised' and 'sanitary' spaces are a set of 'expectations about the link between geographical ordering and behaviour' (Cresswell, 2005, p. 129). Such relation between space and behaviour leads us to understand the inappropriateness of street vending in a relativist way: inappropriate behaviours are not inherently inappropriate; the same behaviour could be appropriate in some places and inappropriate in other places. The inappropriateness of street vending comes from its geographical transgression of the official spatial-behavioural order.

By looking at street vending as a geographical transgression and studying its 'heretical geographies' (Cresswell, 1996, p. 29), we are able to reveal the official 'orthodox geographies' of *wenming* and *weisheng*: their distributions, boundaries, and dynamic process of (re)production. Through the flexible administration of chengguan, the civilised and sanitary spaces are only produced and reproduced in the path of capital flow and the centre of global gaze. As Smith indicates, 'the revanchist city is, to be sure, a dual and divided city of wealth and poverty' (Smith, 1996, p. 227). There is a global trend that urban space is becoming more and more fragmented into 'fortified spaces, islands of enclosure' (Soja, 2000, p. 299), each has its own spatial order different from others. In Chinese cities, gated communities, shopping malls, tourist sites and central business districts are imagined to be 'high-end' and 'international' and hence need to exclude those unsuitable population 'whose class and cultural positions diverge from the builders and their target markets (Flusty, 2001, p. 659)', while the backstreets, alleys, urban villages or peripheral suburbs serve as their temporary shelters.

### 5.4.3 The aesthetic orientation of urban planning

The aforementioned urban administration practices are actually a device for the government to realise its urban planning vision. As such, the Chinese revanchist urbanism should be reflected in the context of Chinese contemporary urban planning. Since the post-reform devolution of central power into local governments and especially the marketisation of urban land in 1989, an aesthetic orientation started to prevail in Chinese urban planning. The 'big, fancy, and magnificent' become the obsession of China's ambitious mayors (C. Q. L. Xue, 2005, p. 70). Broad, grand, major roads or avenues are built in many cities, along with new development projects such as high-end commercial office buildings, gated communities and huge squares that dominate contemporary Chinese landscape. This trend has been criticised as vanity projects in media (Xi, 2014). Yu & Padua (2007) argues that such 'cosmetic' planning has become status symbols that improves politicians' profile and benefits their political career.

Chapter 4 has mentioned similar aesthetics-oriented planning in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century, which was greatly influenced by European and American cities. Out of similar intentions to the modern-day National Civilised City and National Sanitised City campaigns, planners and political leaders in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also wished to produce 'civilised' and 'sanitised' spaces, in the belief that scientific and rational planning could turn China from backwardness and chaos to civilisation and order (X. Li, 2000). Today's aesthetics-oriented planning, despite different socio-political background, is in a sense a continuation of the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century planning, because they share similar desires of 'making a grand view' by building monumental squares and creating grand landscapes; modernist planning concepts that prioritises automobiles over walking are still dominant; Western aesthetics such as Baroque-style decoration, Beaux-Arts architecture or residential development project duplicating American models are still found prevalent (Yu & Padua, 2007).

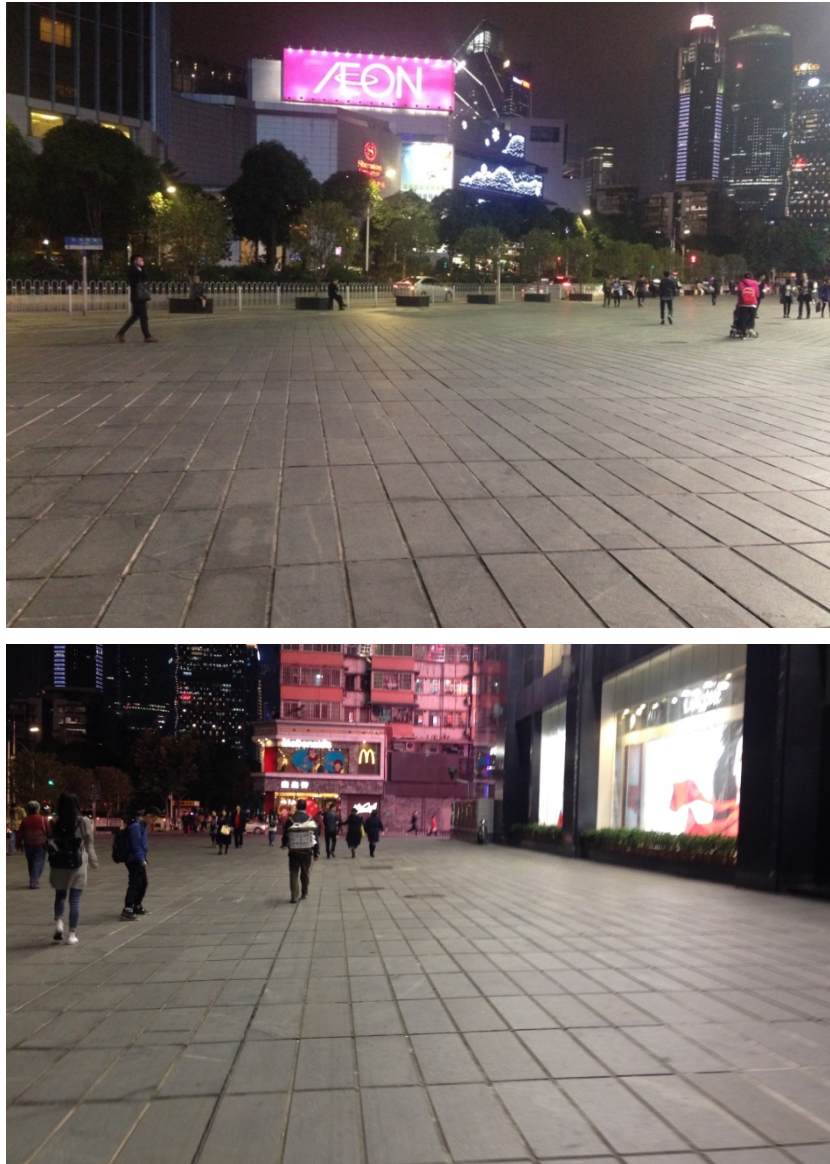
Today's Chinese urban planning is, predominantly, modernist (Sun, 2017), which worships efficiency, functionality and visual order, and adopts land-use zoning and automobile-oriented transport. These characters echo Le Corbusier's modernist planning. As Yung Ho Chang said, 'Le Corbusier is dead, ... but he's still alive in Chinese cities (J. Wang, 2008, p. 11-12)'. In the post-reform era, urban neighbourhoods have experienced significant restructuring (see Wu and He, 2005). New town plans greatly privileged cars over pedestrians, leaving little space for neighbourhood life, in which street vending is deeply embedded. In a city where local neighbourhoods are

replaced by gated communities, human-scale streets are replaced by 8-lane boulevards, street vendors inevitably become out of place, only finding their space in decayed urban villages and the few surviving back alleys.

In order to create magnificent landscapes, China's urban planning also features a fondness for large, empty city plazas. This can be traced to the Socialist period, when squares of grand scale were built as demonstrations of political power (most famously the Tiananmen square built in 1959). In the post-reform era, such planning has been continued by the many corporation plazas in downtown. Figure 5.6 shows a large vacant space in downtown Guangzhou, in front of the GrandBuy shopping mall (see Chapter 6). No practical uses were planned for it, except to create a magnificent landscape. However, this visually magnificent space is unfriendly to the actual space users. As Jan Gehl (2013, p. 79) points out, passers-by usually prefer to stand or sit on the edges of a public space rather than in the middle. The space shown in Figure 5.6 lacks such edges. The only edge is the wall in right of the lower photo, which is a closed, passive façade, or what Gehl calls a 'hard edge' that does not invite any interactions with passers-by but only showcases huge, bright commercial ads. Gehl points out that 'soft edges' such as frontyards, forecourts, shopfronts or porches contribute to the making of lively urban spaces, while 'hard edges' make people feel bored and quicken their paces to walk through.

Another evidence of this space's hostility to its users is that although it is in a busy location with heavy flows of people, there is not a single seat. Passers-by can only have rest on the narrow steps, which are not designed initially for sitting and are by no means comfortable (Figure 5.7). But even sitting on the narrow steps has been rejected by the mall owner by filling the steps with plants (see the right photo). This is a clear sign that the mall only welcomes its customers and painstakingly excludes other people. Such privatisation and commercialisation of public spaces are common in most Chinese cities. These spaces are more of planners' tools to display magnificence and modernity rather than being lived by the residents. They exemplify what Lefebvre calls 'representations of space', that is, the conceptualised space, 'the space of scientists, planners, urbanists ... who identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived' (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 38). The modernist aesthetics dream of a glossy, pristine environment with abstract geometric form, which is not to be stained by the dirty vendors who produce smoke, grease and garbage. The imposition of such image necessarily leads to revanchist exclusions towards the undesirables. 'In a world where image is everything, the dark

side of renewal is that it effectively erases or, rather, “annihilates” urban spaces (Mitchell, 1997) for itinerant street vendors, beggars, street youth, and the homeless (Swanson, 2007, p. 709).’



*Figure 5.6 A hollow space in downtown Guangzhou*





Figure 5.7 Left: pedestrians sitting beside the window; Right: step once seated by people are installed with plants

## 5.5 Discussion

### 5.5.1 Discursive contestations around street vending

This chapter analyses the formation, logic and practises of revanchist urbanism in contemporary Chinese cities. Driven by the need to attract external investments and the political tasks of creating National Civilised and Sanitary Cities, local governments put lots of effort to create modern urban landscapes that are tidy, clean, ordered and attractive. This not only involved the beautification of physical urban environment, but also involved the social cleansing of unwanted people, street vendors being one of the targets. During this process, the early-modern concepts of *wenming*, *weisheng* and *shirong* have been re-invoked and developed into revanchist discourses that stir the vengeful sentiment of the public against the uncivilised street vendors who ruin city environment.

A similar case of social cleansing is India's 'bourgeois environmentalism' (Baviskar, 2003; Bose, 2013) which refers to a series of policies from demolition of informal settlements to exclusion of street hawkers and immigrants to cater for the 'upper-class concerns around aesthetics, leisure, safety and health' (Baviskar, 2003, p. 90). However, unlike the Indian vendors who are able to organise union, hold demonstration and sue the government (Mathur, 2014), the Chinese vendors have not taken any of these actions. On the one hand, the Chinese government imposes strict restrictions on public demonstration and social organisation, making it impossible for the lower class. On the other hand, the vendors themselves are less educated and do not have the awareness and ability to voice themselves to the public, take on formal resistance or resort to legal approaches to affect policymaking.

Although the vendors themselves remain silent, journalists and intellectuals often speak

up for them. Over the years, debates about street vending have been topical in the public sphere. Although the official discourses of *wenming*, *weisheng* and *shirong* (by which the exclusions are justified) are well-established values that few people would doubt their desirability and positivity, some counter-discourses were raised to support the legitimacy of vendors. For example, the term *wenming* is actually not a self-consistent concept without any internal contradictions. Its multiple meanings contain possibilities for contestation. When interpreted as ‘advanced, progressed’, it could be used to support the making of modern urban landscapes, but being ‘advanced’ and ‘progressed’ also involves the affirmation of human right and the support of subordinated groups. Thus, the same discourse of *wenming* could be used conversely to criticise the revanchist urbanism for cutting off lower-class’ source of livelihood. For example, commentaries have opposed local governments’ strict eviction of marginal groups during the NCC campaign by questioning ‘what is the true meaning of *wenming*’ (Zhu, 2007). Plenty of news reports sympathised the hardship of street vendors and earned compassion from the society for them (L. Ma, 2013; Wen, 2013). Vendors’ livelihoods have been extensively raised as a reason to support street vending (P. Wang, 2012; The Beijing News, 2017). Additionally, since *wenming* also means the politeness and refinedness of behaviour, chengguan officers who drove away street vendors by resorting to brutal force were criticised as ‘*bu wenming*’ (not civilised) (Li, 2015; Chen, 2017). Such criticism sometimes resulted in government’s ambivalent law enforcements (Huang et al., 2014).

In 2009, a parody of *Qingming Shangtu Tu* (see 5.8) named ‘*Qingming Shanghe Tu: When Chengguan Come*’ was spread widely online<sup>38</sup>. By erasing the vendors and leaving only the desolate street, the picture expressed a sarcasm that government’s ban on street vending kills the vibrancy of urban life. An article commented:

*... what city image do we need? Is it a well-ordered one with the poor hard to make a living, or one that is a bit messy and congested, but with lively atmosphere and spaces for everyone to earn his/her livelihood, like Qingming Shanghe Tu? ... Without leniency to survival, order is meaningless, just like without goodness, beauty becomes hypocrisy. This is what Qingming Shanghe Tu teaches us.*

(Zhong, 2014)

The author questions the official values of order and beauty by upholding the survival

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/9/4/9/n2489634.htm>

of the poor and the liveliness of city. It is noteworthy that these reasons are not new, but have existed since the imperial era as the legitimacy of street vending: streets congested with vendors were seen as a cheerful, lively scene, as well as a message that even the poorest commoners were able to make a living (see 4.1.2).



Figure 5.8 Internet meme 'Qingming Shanghe Tu: When Chengguan Come' (top), in comparison with the original painting (bottom).

Another counter-discourse that has been frequently utilised by the media to justify street vending is its long history (Liu, 2014). Lawyer Xia Lin, in defence of a street vendor sentenced death penalty for killing a chengguan officer when his wares were confiscated, argued in the court: 'vendors and peddlers selling in the street is a rightful occupation that has existed since ancient times'<sup>39</sup>. Similar arguments are commonly seen (G. Peng, 2017; F. Wang, 2007). Figure 5.9 illustrates the discursive contestations around street

<sup>39</sup> [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_48e8035d010007jo.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_48e8035d010007jo.html)



vending.

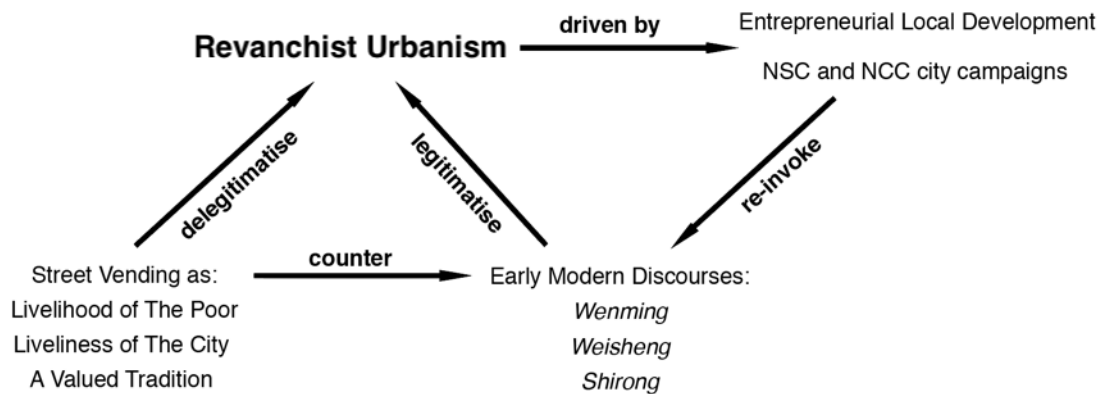


Figure 5.9 Discursive contestations around the revanchist urbanism against street vendors

When represented as a valued tradition, the negative image of street vendors is turned into a positive one. Many streets and parks set up sculptures of old-time peddlers (see Figure 5.10) in order to reproduce a pseudo-traditional streetscape and create a quaint, touristy atmosphere<sup>40</sup>. Similarly, a well-known TV advertisement of black sesame soup presents a peddler hawking its product<sup>41</sup>. Ironically, while the faked vendors are welcomed and appreciated, the living ones are excluded. What is needed in street vendors is only a sign. As Jean Baudrillard indicates, signs can be exchanged like commodities; in a consumerist society, what is consumed is only the sign, not the object itself (Baudrillard, 2005). The vendor sculptures are more favoured than the living ones, for they are clean, quiet, odourless, do not move around and obstruct traffic. Here, the image of vendors is hollowed out, sanitised and civilised, leaving only a sign to be displayed and consumed. Street vendors are made into specimens of the lost and romanticised past, and utilised by designers to create a tasteful shopping environment and attract more customers. Such exploration of local tradition is a ‘cultural strategy’ (Zukin, 1995) that serves as a tool of branding and marketing in the making of city identity, since difference and exoticism are valued in an increasingly homogeneous world.

<sup>40</sup> See Bromley (2000) and Gaubatz (2008) for similar cases in the US and Beijing.

<sup>41</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZD\\_qowLpeuE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZD_qowLpeuE)



Figure 10 Modern statues of old-time street vendors <sup>42</sup>

### 5.5.2 Historical continuity of revanchist discourses

A historical continuity can be identified between the contemporary official discourses and the ones in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the names reveal (Figure 5.11), the contemporary national urban campaigns have built their legitimacy upon the early modern discourses: *wenming*, *weisheng* and *shirong*. As shown in 4.2.4 and 4.2.5, these concepts were introduced from the West (except *shirong*) under a colonial West-central power relation. After being advocated by intellectuals and the government, they have been deeply rooted in modern Chinese value system and become central elements of the official imagination of modernity. In other words, although colonial discourse is ‘generated within the society and cultures of the colonizers, it becomes that discourse within which the colonized may also come to see themselves. (Ashcroft et. al, 2013, p.51)’. In a self-colonialist manner, these discourses were later utilised by the authorities to justify their evictions of street vendors, vagabonds and beggars. These discursive legacies are inherited by today’s revanchist urbanism to give grounds for its crackdowns on subordinated groups. The official propaganda has made these concepts highly visible in urban space (see Figure 5.12).

<sup>42</sup> Photos from Internet ([http://gb.cri.cn/9223/2006/08/21/109@1182853\\_4.htm](http://gb.cri.cn/9223/2006/08/21/109@1182853_4.htm); [http://qd.ifeng.com/special/lywh/detail\\_2013\\_03/06/618638\\_0.shtml](http://qd.ifeng.com/special/lywh/detail_2013_03/06/618638_0.shtml)).

## Early Modern Discourses

## Contemporary Urban Movements

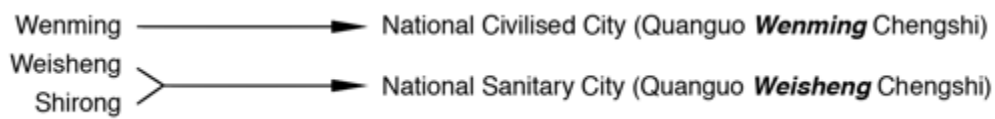


Figure 5.11 Discursive continuity between early modern era and the present



Figure 5.12 Public signs read: 'Enhance city image, create National Civilised City' (left) and 'Create National Sanitary City, build civilised and happy Jinan' (right).

India's case provides us a similar case of continuity between the present and the past. As McFarlane argues, the sanitation-oriented urbanism in today's India is far from new, but has figured consistently since the colonial period (McFarlane, 2008). By contrasting the spatial imaginaries and logics of contemporary India's post-colonial, nationalist urban governance with the British governance in the colonial period, he argues that despite the shift of governmental perspective from British–Native divisions to domestic urban-rural divisions, the colonial notions of cleanliness, sanitation and order still play a role in today's bourgeois environmentalist ideology and shape India's urban landscapes.

In a similar vein, China's contemporary revanchist urbanism is based on the early modern discourses which constructed the problematic image of street vending/vendors. As the Chinese urban governments intend to attract global capital and display modern images to the world, they have to push their revanchist projects by exploiting the cultural logics of *wenming*, *weisheng* and *shirong*. Through historicising today's ostensibly 'new' urban politics, this thesis attempts to enrich the revanchist approach with a historical perspective. In fact, the concept 'revanchist city' itself is initially coined based on the historical similarity between the revanchism in late-19th-century Paris and the similarly vengeful exclusionary policies in late-20th-century New York City.



## Chapter 6 Exploring the street vending life: a case in Guangzhou

The last chapter has shown how anti-vending ideology took shape in the post-reform era, and how the chengguan officers attempt to curtail street vending in central urban spaces. However, there are still a great number of vendors managing to continue this marginalised and problematised occupation. How is this possible? How do the vendors cope with chengguan's administration? And how do the vendors adjust themselves to fit in with urban life? This chapter tries to answer these questions by giving a close-up of the everyday life of street vendors in Guangzhou, China, with a special focus on the Tianhe CBD.

### 6.1 Introduction to fieldwork site

#### 6.1.1 The rise of Chinese consumerism and the formation of Tianhe CBD

As the third largest city in China, Guangzhou's continuous economic growth makes it a city with strong purchasing power, a rich business atmosphere and a prevailing consumer culture (She, 2006). This consumer culture began in the 1990s when China's urban consumption patterns changed from mostly 'hard consumption' (food, clothes and other daily necessities) to more 'soft consumption' (entertainment, tourism, fashion and socialising), (White, 2000, p. 169) with a remarkable drop of Engel's coefficient<sup>43</sup> from 53.8% (1992) to 39.4% (2000)<sup>44</sup>. This was hailed by scholars as a 'consumer revolution' (Chen & Zhong, 2016; Davis, 2005; C. Li, 1998; Wu & others, 1999) which transformed China from an 'ascetic society' to a consumer society (Wang, 2009). In the socialist period, the people were seen as producers rather than consumers. 'Hard work and plain living' was promoted as the moral ideal, while consumption was condemned as a corrupt lifestyle. Since the 1990s, the state started to steer public opinion to a positive attitude to consumption, in order to stimulate mass consumption and expand the domestic market. What followed was the rise of Chinese consumerism in the late 1990s (White, 2000, Chapter 10). Consumerism is distinct from mass consumption in that the need of consumption is no longer to passively meet the material requirement, but to actively chase after the consumer culture which produces and reproduces a constant consumption desire. Also, consumption became an identifying act (Fornas,

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<sup>43</sup> The Engel's coefficient refers to the proportion of money spent on food in household expenses. According to Engel's law, lower value of the coefficient suggests higher living standard.

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.stats.gov.cn/zjtj/zftx/jnggkf30n/200810/t20081031\\_65691.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/zjtj/zftx/jnggkf30n/200810/t20081031_65691.html)



1995, p. 192). Class and group identities are constructed through and distinguished by the fashion, style and taste of consumption. In the case of China, consumer culture has a close relation to the making of the rising middle class (Chen & Zhong, 2016, pp. 1–22; Zhou, 2005). Buying from shopping malls is considered decent and shows a middle-class identity, while buying from street vendors belongs to the lowest rank in the consumption ladder, often associated with lower class or rural migrant workers.

Teemall was born in this trend of consumerism. Opened in 1996, it is the earliest shopping centre in China. Over the years, it became the centre of Guangzhou's consumer culture. The success of Teemall pulled the development of a whole commercial district around it, comprising business, culture, entertainment and catering venues (see Figure 6.1). This is the Tianhe CBD, the fieldwork site I focus on in this chapter. Reportedly, Teemall itself used to be the shopping centre with the largest visitor volume in the world (Lin & Huang, 2005), not to mention its surrounding businesses. The prosperity of this area has attracted huge visitor flow as well as large number of street traders who try to peddle to the crowd of consumers.

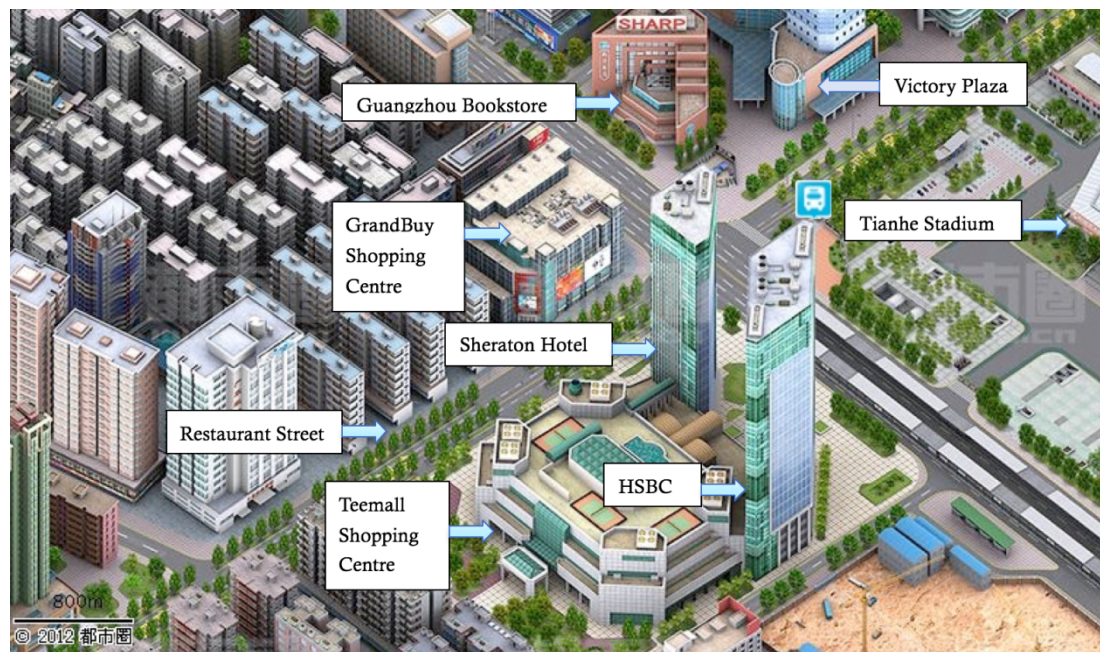


Figure 6.1 Map of Tianhe CBD, marks by author (Source: [www.o.cn](http://www.o.cn))

What makes Tianhe CBD an ideal site of fieldwork, in addition to its huge number of street vendors, is its significance to city image. Tianhe CBD is located in the 'new central axis' of Guangzhou. Since the 1980s, this axis has been planned as the centre of

urban development as well as the showcase of Guangzhou's modern landscape<sup>45</sup>. Due to its prime importance to the image of the city, the Guangzhou chengguan bureau has listed Tianhe CBD as a strict control area (see Figure 5.2) and has made a continuous effort to drive away the vendors. Thus, Teemall and its surrounding business circle have become an everyday battlefield between the government and vendors because of its great significance to both sides.

### **6.1.2 Overview of vendors in Guangzhou**

#### **Scale and composition**

It is difficult to calculate the precise number of vendors in Guangzhou, because they are out of the official registration system and highly mobile. According to the official data from Guangzhou chengguan bureau in 2010, there were approximately 300,000 vendors in Guangzhou<sup>46</sup>. Chengguan officer Mr. Chen said it is not necessary to get the precise number, because 'the scale of street vendors varies in different periods. It gets more in summer and less in winter. During 2010's Asian Games, we carried out strict administration, and most of the vendors in the downtown area left. They came back when we loosened the regulation after the event.'

#### **Kind of goods and services**

The kinds of goods and services vendors provide are too various to summarise. Goods can be briefly divided into three categories: food (e.g. cooked food, vegetables and fruit); daily necessities (e.g. clothes, wallets, handbags, digital accessories, porcelain bowls, flowers); and cultural products (e.g. pirated books and DVDs, calligraphy brushes, toys). Services include bicycle repairing, shoe repairing, mobile screen protector installing, haircutting, fortune telling and signature design.

Their goods are supplied in different ways. Food vendors get their raw materials from suburban wholesale markets. Some vendors plant vegetables and fruit in their own farms and carry them from suburban to central areas by tricycle or car. Daily necessities and cultural products are stocked from personal relations (mostly fellow villagers), while some vendors buy wholesale from online sources. On the online shopping website Taobao, one can buy various products that are suitable for street vending as well as a whole set of street vending tools (foldable table, carpet, ads board) at low prices.

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<sup>45</sup> [http://special.gznews.gov.cn/2010/node\\_567/background/12771061555108.shtml](http://special.gznews.gov.cn/2010/node_567/background/12771061555108.shtml)

<sup>46</sup> <http://city.sina.com.cn/focus/t/2010-08-17/14557353.html>

### **Reason of occupational choice**

There are full-time vendors who engage in street vending as their sole source of subsistence, and part-time vendors who have daytime jobs and engage in street vending at night for extra money. Among the 40 interviewees, 32 are full-time, 8 are part-time and 19 of them used to do other jobs before turning to street vending. When asked why they became vendors, the answers can be summarised as:

1. Steady income enough to maintain livelihood, or more considerable if doing well. Moreover, the incomes are earned directly to vendors' pockets without the trouble of being withheld by the boss, which is a prevalent problem among Chinese migrant worker employers (Halegua, 2008).
2. No professional skills required. Most vendors are only educated in primary or middle school, and are not qualified for professional jobs.
3. Free, independent lifestyle. Many vendors complained about the strictly regulated and exhausting life of formal jobs, and said street vending allows them to arrange their own time.

Mr. Fan, a vendor who used to work in factory, expressed discontent with the factory life:

*You have to work endlessly every day, and there's nothing else you can do. You can't talk while working. Even going to toilet needs to be approved. But here being a street vendor, I can chat with people, use my phone ... It's way better.*

For years, labour studies have focused on the oppressive working condition in factories and the experience of hardship, alienation and struggle among China's migrant workers (Chang, 2009; Lee, 1998; Ngai, 2005). Nevertheless, factory experience does not represent the totality of migrant experience. Street vending offers migrant workers a self-employed, self-dominant livelihood and enables them to live in the city yet stay out of the urban industrial system. Thus, the research on street vendors can reveal a different picture of Chinese migrant workers as a complement to the research of factory workers.

## **6.2 Spatio-temporal pattern of street vendors in Tianhe CBD**

### **6.2.1 Spatial regionalisation of street vending**

As Bromley (2000, p. 15-16) notes, urban space can be divided into three types based on

the degree of control of street vendors: 1) 'conflict-zones' where the agglomeration of vendors is a concern for the authorities; 2) areas where vendors are not very numerous or problematical, and 3) a few exclusive and elite areas where street vendors are aggressively excluded. While places like government buildings belong to the third type and the suburbs and urban villages belong to the second type, Tianhe CBD is a typical 'conflict-zone' where the cluster of vendors has become a problem for the authorities yet has not been thoroughly eradicated. For years, it has been an arena competed over by the authorities and the vendors. However, even within the Tianhe CBD, there is micro spatial differentiation with regard to the strength of administrative regulation. As shown in Figure 6.2, areas like shopping centre gateways or bus stops are under strict surveillance of chengguan (marked in red).



Figure 6.2 Plan of Tianhe CBD (drawn by author)

: Metro station entrance

: Bus stop

On the other hand, the red areas are also ideal sites for the vendors. Fanning out around the shopping mall entrances, street vendors try to 'forestall' the flow of customers

walking towards the mall<sup>47</sup>. Resultantly, these spots are micro conflict-zones within a larger conflict zone (the CBD). In order to maximise their profit, vendors rush in when chengguan officers are absent, and escape when officers are approaching. This routinised temporal-spatial pattern of action is what Giddens terms 'regionalisation', namely, 'the zoning of time-space in relation to routinized social practices (Giddens, 1986, p. 119).' In the theoretical framework of regionalisation, three pairs of concepts are useful for our analysis:

*1. Spatial boundary and temporal duration/span of region.*

*2. Front region and back region. The front region is the space dominated by official norms and one needs to perform to comply with it. The back region is the space outside the surveillance of power and where individuals can have more self-expression.*

*3. The centre/periphery differentiation and the established/outside. Those who occupy centres establish themselves by a variety of forms of social enclosure to sustain distance from others who are effectively treated as outsiders.*

(Giddens, 1986, pp. 118–131)

Urban life, as a complex system of restless heterogeneous activities, comprises multilayer regionalisation. While there are institutionalised formal regionalisations such as school, police, hospital, office, street vending involves an 'informal regionalisation' that is maintained not by formal regulations, but by the spontaneous activities in the informal sector. Figure 6.2 illustrates how the everyday vending activities in Tianhe CBD are spatially regionalised, with routinised locations and boundaries of vending sites. The choice of these vending sites is a prime concern for vendors. Most vendors have tried selling in different places around the city, and eventually settle in two or three places after comparison. A vendor told me: 'if you occupy a good place, you can make much more deals. Selling one hour in a crowded place could earn the same as selling three hours in a less crowded place.' There are three aspects to consider when choosing a vending site: the amount and kind of pedestrians, and the degree of government

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<sup>47</sup> Apart from the red areas, spot I is also crowded with vendors because it is next to the restaurant street, but it is not highly regulated by chengguan because it is in a back street.

regulation.

Good vending sites should be located in places with large flow of people such as bus stops, metro stations, crossroads, or near residential areas, shopping areas or food markets. Moreover, vendors' goods should fit the needs of passing customers. Therefore, vendors need to familiarise themselves with the type of nearby customers to make better sales. In Tianhe CBD, vendors in spots E, F and H mostly sell daily necessities like toys, clothes, laptop and mobile accessories because their customers are from the Teemall and Hongcheng shopping centres. Vendors in D sell stationery (mostly calligraphy brushes and papers) and pirated CDs and books, because they are in front of Guangzhou's largest bookstore. Vendors in B and I are mostly food vendors (see Figure 6.3), because they are next to a food street. As many customers like to have a main course in the restaurants and buy snacks from vendors as side dishes, the vendors here have developed a symbiotic relationship with the restaurants. Customers can place orders with the vendors and wait in the restaurants, and the vendors will later bring their food to the restaurant. When asked, the restaurant runners do not complain about their business being stolen, because 'people have to have main dishes here (in restaurants). Vendors only sell snacks. You can't get full by snacks. And they help us to attract customers.' Such coexistence between the formal and informal economy is found in other countries (Crossa, 2009). Sometimes, a vendor sells more than one kind of good to maximise their opportunity. A vendor sells breakfast (fried dumpling and soy milk) in the morning, and then changes to sell snacks (boiled peanut and sweetcorn) at noon and at night. Another vendor who sells handbags and stockings at the same time told me she is 'fishing with two rods', which doubles her chance to make deals.





Figure 6.3 Food vendors in spot 1



Figure 6.4 Front and back regions, and retreating routes

During my fieldwork, I noticed that every time officer arrived, vendors escaped to the same places, as shown in Figure 6.4. The yellow areas signify the less regulated areas, where vendors are likely to be tolerated by the officers. They are safer, yet also less profitable due to relatively fewer passers-by. These areas are where vendors retreat to when the chengguan officers are present (retreating routes shown as the grey arrows).

In Giddens' framework of regionalisation, the front region refers to the space where social practices are visibly disclosed and are under strong regulation of the normative sanctions, and the back region refers to the backstage of social practices that is invisibly hidden from the front region. In Figure 6.4, the red areas are front regions, for they are visible from the main roads (Tianhe Road and Tiuxi Road) and therefore significant to city governance. These front regions are the showcases of city image. They are subject to the government's imagination of urban space, i.e. the civilised and sanitised space, and therefore are the focus of chengguan's everyday regulation. The yellow areas are back regions, the invisible part of the city, which the government pay less attention to. Although the back regions are relatively safe, most vendors still try to enter the front regions because, as mentioned above, getting closer to the flow of people would result in considerable earnings. To survive the government's daily patrol, the vendors have developed guerrilla-like vigilance, agility and micro tactics. They choose the loosely regulated yellow areas as their backstage 'bases', and the intensely regulated red areas as their frontstage 'battlefield'. Through the skilful utilisation of the complex urban settings and the swift back-and-forth movement between the base and battlefield, the vendors take every opportunity to encroach into the centre of power. Moreover, every vendor stays on high alert for chengguan officers, who could arrive at any time. 'Being a vendor, the first thing is learning to be vigilant at all times, otherwise your wares and cart may be confiscated by the officers and that's a huge loss.' To prevent losing all the wares, many vendors hide their main stock in the bushes in back regions.

Certain spatial boundaries exist between the front and back regions, which are known to all the vendors here. These boundaries are informal and implicit, but fixed and settled through tacit agreements after an extended process of repeated tests and silent negotiations during their everyday interaction. The vendors know how far they have to retreat to gain the tolerance of officers, and how close they can get to the front regions to maximise their income yet avoid having conflict with officers. When officers are present, vendors make use of the varying strictness of control between frontstage and



backstage, constantly moving back and forth, in and out, loitering at the boundary. For example, when chengguan officers are patrolling in spot H, vendors move to G, which is not chengguan's strict control area. However, the vendors still try to stay as close as possible to H, where the pedestrian flow from shopping centres to bus stops brings business opportunity. The closer they get to the bus stops, the more customers they can get access to. As a result, the vendors usually retreat only a few steps from H to G, facing the chengguan officers in plain sight, and the officers in H do not interfere in their business, though they are almost next to each other (see Figure 6.5). An invisible line lies between them.



Figure 6.5 Spatial boundary between front region and back region

Since the ideal vending sites (red areas) are limited, a certain level of competition exists among street vendors. Such competitive relations are mediated by certain rules. The basic rule is, vendors selling similar products should keep a certain distance to avoid stealing business from each other. A vendor selling fried tofu told me:

*Once there was a new guy who always did business next to me. I said, 'you should go somewhere else' but he wouldn't listen. In the end, I punched him and he finally knew the rule. That's our basic rule.*

Sometimes, vendors from the same native place are organised into gang-like groups and exclude other vendors from competition. A vendor Mr. Xu told me he was told by the vendor groups in Baohua Road not to sell shoes or belts, otherwise they will beat him.

If a place is wanted by more than one vendor, the rule is first-come, first-served. However, in the busy locations where vendors inevitably cluster together, the 'senior' vendors who have been selling in the same place for years often establish a stable exclusive position that keeps away competitors. The newcomers can only sell around

them at a distance. For example, some of the book and disc vendors in spot D and food vendors in spot I have fixed vending locations where other vendors have to give way (see 6.3.2). Based on the stability of the vending site, street vendors can be divided into the seniors who hold a fixed place over time; the juniors who have to give way to the seniors; and the itinerant vendors who have no stationary vending site and do business as they walk and peddle around. These three types of vendor form a three-layer ecological community of street vending economy, maintained by an implicit order.

### **6.2.2 Temporal regionalisation of street vending**

Section 6.2.1 illustrates how the seemingly disordered street vending activity in Tianhe CBD is in fact regionalised in multiple ways, such as the routinised vending sites, escape route, boundaries between front and back regions, and the senior/junior power structure that affects vending location. However, the regionalisation is not only spatial, but also temporal. Based on the change of pedestrian volume and chengguan's regulation through a day, vendors have a time schedule of when to appear in the CBD.

6:30 – 8:30 am

In the morning, there are no chengguan officers. Around 5 food vendors show up every day in spots H and B, selling breakfast to the office workers who work in Tianhe CBD. After the morning rush hour, vendors all leave, because there are few people shopping until noon.

11:00 am – 2:00 pm

The vendors in Tianhe CBD have a rough knowledge of the timing of the customer flow and the arrival of chengguan officers. A snack vendor said: 'every day I come here at around 11 am, because before 11 there are few customers. The office workers nearby start to find a place for lunch at around 11: 30.' I was also told that chengguan personnel have their lunch break at noon every day, hence it is safe to trade in the otherwise dangerous front stage spaces. These two factors make noontime a climax of vending business in Tianhe CBD.

When it is near noon, the CBD turns from the previous quietness into a bustling area with numerous office workers from nearby companies coming out for lunch. Meanwhile, plenty of food vendors show up to peddle to them. According to my observation, there are approximately 5 vendors respectively in spots H, E and B, and 15 in spot I. I is the most clustered place because, firstly, it is in the back street where chengguan personnel

do not interfere much, and secondly, it is next to a street of middle-price restaurants, whose customers are easily attracted by food vendors.

2:00 pm – 5:00 pm

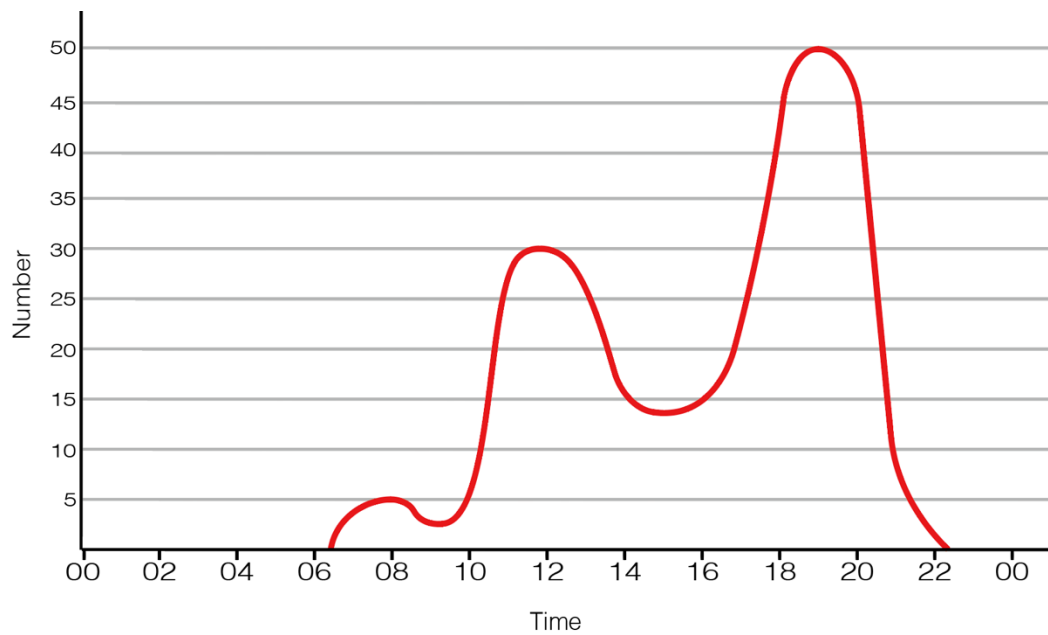
Since noon time, chengguan officers start to show up in Tianhe CBD occasionally, which interrupts vendors' businesses. But from 2-5 pm, they stay and patrol around the area. This schedule is known to all the vendors here. When it comes close to 2 pm, some vendors start moving to back stages, in case of officers' sudden arrival. The cars of chengguan patrol between spots F, B, D, H, staying at each place for a while. During this period, vendors mostly stay in yellow areas, because those who enter red areas would risk their wares being confiscated. As a result, many vendors leave Tianhe CBD and move to other places to continue their business.

5: 00 pm – 10: 00 pm

From 5 to 10 pm, Tianhe CBD comes to its second and the largest climax of street vending in a day. For one thing, chengguan officers leave the area after 5 pm and seldom come back, which means street vendors can do business in the red areas safely. For another, the huge volume of pedestrian flow in the evening rush hour brings considerable business opportunity to vendors. As a result, many vendors who have been selling in other places or have their formal job in the daytime show up in Tianhe CBD to take a share of the huge opportunity. The number of vendors reaches the daily peak in this area, with about 10 vendors in H-G, E-F and B respectively, 15 in I, and 5 in K, turning the CBD into a prosperous outdoor night market.

Street vending in Tianhe CBD ends at about 10:30 pm every day, when all the shopping sites are closed and the metro stops service. After that, the daylong liveliness of the whole district comes to an end. Shoppers go home, lights are shut, leaving only the quiet, empty streets.

Figure 6.6 illustrates the approximate curve of the changing number of street vendors in Tianhe CBD across a day.



*Figure 6.6 The change of number of street vendors across a day*

Street vendors' daily schedule is quite different from other urban residents. According to time-geography study on residents in Guangzhou (Zhou & Deng, 2010), the daily activity schedule of residents of Guangzhou can be divided into: 7 *am* – 8 *am* commute from home to work; 9 *am* – 5 *pm* work; 6 *pm* – 11 *pm* leisure (mainly participated in by the middle class); 11 *pm* – 7 *am* sleep. For the vendors, as mentioned in 6.2.2, morning and noon are the work time for food vendors, while night time is the most prosperous time when all the vendors come out. Figure 6.7 illustrates the daily circle of the time schedule of street vendors and urban residents:

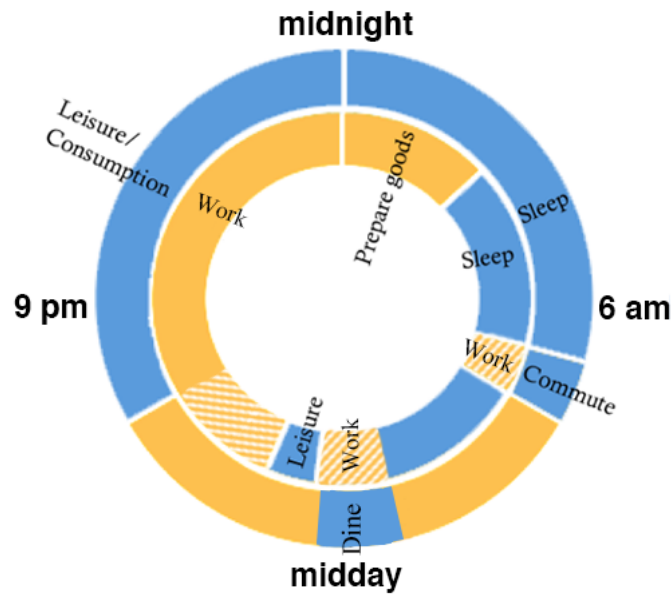


Figure 6.7 The daily routine of residents and vendors (Inner circle represents street vendors; outer circle represents other residents. Working hours are marked in yellow; leisure hours in blue. Gridded yellow means work time for certain kinds of vendors.)

It can be seen from this figure that vendors' work/leisure schedule is opposite to other residents': the leisure hours of residents are the working hours of vendors, and vice versa. The schedule of most urban residents is disciplined into the 8-hour system of labour. In order to peddle to them, vendors adjust their work-leisure schedule to the opposite of residents, so as to operate business in the leisure and consumption hours of the city. Every morning, when residents commute from home to workplace, vendors appear at the entrance of gated communities, bus stations, underground stations, pedestrian bridges, etc., to offer them a convenient breakfast. In the daytime when residents are at work, vendors are at leisure; but in the night time when residents hang out on the street and go shopping, vendors start working. That is to say, although street vending is an informal economy free from the temporal discipline of formal system, the lives of vendors is still bound up with the formal working hour. In order to earn a living, they have to subordinate their bodily rhythm to the timetable of office workers and live an unusual life with reversed day and night, abandoning the natural circadian rhythm of village life. A vendor said:

*We did sleep earlier in village, because there is nothing to do at night. In the city people have fun go shopping at night, so we come out and peddle at night, and naturally we sleep late. We have got used to it.*

For the breakfast vendors, their business opportunity is created by the spatial separation between residence and workplace in modern city. They actively fit themselves into this gap by selling breakfast to other residents on their way to work. This offers another example of the relation between vendors' informal economy and the formal economy: the former is not detached from the latter, but integrated to and even produced by it.

Literature in geography has been paying attention to the temporal dimension of the city and seeing the lived city as a polyrhythmic ensemble (Crang, 2001). That is to say, urban systems function in manifold rhythms, either repetitive or episodic, long-term or transient, fast or slow. Practiced by diverse subjects, the conjunction of plural rhythms forms the symphony of a city. There are rhythms of office workers, school students, street cleaners, taxi drivers, chengguan officers, overlapping and intersecting with each other. The activity of street vendors makes up a part of the whole constellation of urban temporalities. By adjusting themselves and fitting in the gap of demand of other residents, vendors form what Lefebvre calls a 'eurhythmia' with other rhythms, that is, the state of diverse rhythms interacting in coordination to form a harmony. On the other hand, the rhythms of street vendor and chengguan officer form an 'arrhythmia', namely, the conflict or dissonance between or among two or more rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004). Through these two types of rhythms, street vending establishes connection with the whole urban ecology.

Huang et al. (2014) find that Guangzhou's exclusionary street-vending policy has gone through a transformation from a punitive approach to an ambivalent one that mixes punishment and benevolence, due to vendors' persistent resistance and the central government's propaganda of building a 'harmonious society'. This is reflected in the limited spatial and temporal range of chengguan's regulation on street vending. As a result, temporally, the noon and night time become relatively safe for vendors; and spatially, the less regulated yellow areas provide shelters to vendors from chengguan's evictions. It is in these temporal and spatial voids of the administration system that vendors find their living space and earn their livelihood.

### **6.3 Becoming a street vendor**

In order to fully enter the world of vendors, I became a vendor myself, selling conch shell ornaments<sup>48</sup> (see Figure 6.8) at 5 Yuan each in Tianhe CBD. Through peddling

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<sup>48</sup> I chose conch shells to sell because they are inexpensive, easy to prepare and require no special skills, thus ideal for a beginner vendor.

with other vendors, I learned how to choose the right place and right time to make a good sale, as well as how to survive under the regulation of chengguan officers. This section presents three scenes of my vending experience, through which we can get a lively understanding of what it is like to sell in the streets of a modern city.



*Figure 6.8 The ornaments I sold*

### **6.3.1 Scene I: Negotiating in an underpass**

With a swelling population and increasing urban density, underpasses and overpasses are commonly built in Chinese cities, which constitute a multilayer urban fabric. Because underpasses and overpasses are often busy with pedestrians, they are favoured by street vendors to operate business (Figure 6.9).



*Figure 6.9 Vendors in underpass*

As a beginner, I started out by selling in an underpass (spot U), because underpasses are normally out of the duty range of chengguan. Rather, spot U is under the regulation of the property management of Youyi Cheng, whom I expected to not be as severe as the



governmental officers. Youyi Cheng is a huge underground shopping centre beneath the whole CBD. Spot U serves as its main entrance, as well as the connection between Teemall shopping centre, Grandbuy shopping centre, Guangzhou Stadium and Guangzhou Bookstore. Such geographical significance makes the underground tunnel a busy passage and an ideal vending site.

The first time I entered the tunnel, once I stood in line with other vendors and opened my stall facing the pedestrians, I immediately felt my role had changed from a passer-by to a street vendor – a feeling that I was part of the tunnel space, part of the ‘publicness’. Other vendors noticed this newcomer and came to chat with me. Mr. Fan, a young vendor, shared a cigarette with me. We had lots to talk about because we were close in age. The friendship with him helped me to blend into vendors’ social network quickly. They chatted not only with each other, but also with the property management staff. As we faced the same three staff every day, we became familiar. The staff came to drive us away from time to time, but in a mild, equal way. Sometimes we cooperated, knowing we could come back at a later moment. Sometimes we managed to stay in the tunnel by pleading and sharing cigarettes with the staff. However, when the staff were under strict orders from above, we had to leave the tunnel. To continue our business, we usually moved to the underpass entrance (Figure 6.10). This space was between the underpass and the ground. On the one hand, it was on the fringe of the property management staff’s duty area, hence we were not strictly sent away. On the other hand, it was still free from the harassment of chengguan, because their area of duty was normally on the ground. Therefore, it is an institutional grey area in the urban management system, which opens opportunities for informal trading.

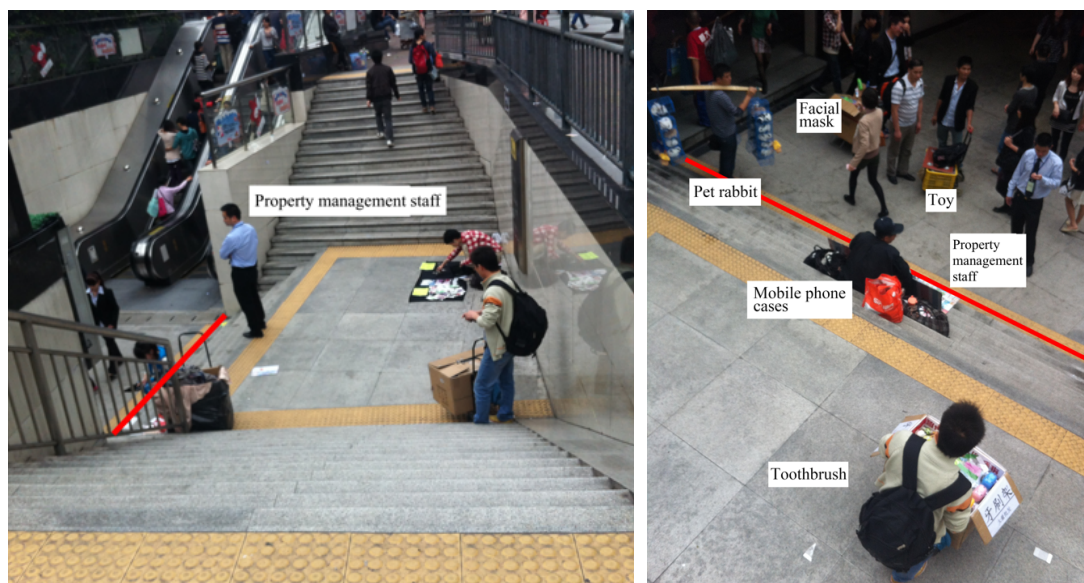


Figure 6.10 Underpass entrance



As shown in Figure 6.10, the vendors were selling various kinds of goods from toothbrushes to rabbits. When the management staff asked us to leave, they only kept us out of the red line, which was the boundary of their duty area. As long as we stayed outside the red line, the staff would not interfere. By cleverly taking advantage of this institutional loophole, the vendors found themselves a space to continue trading. When it got rainy one day, we entered the underpass and pleaded with the staff to stay for the reason of sheltering from the rain. Unable to argue against this fair reason, the staff allowed us to stay. Since many pedestrians were also hiding from the rain in the underpass, our businesses went smoothly, especially for those vendors who had prepared umbrellas to sell in rainy weather.

We can see from this case that personal relationships sometimes play an important role in enabling vendors' businesses. Research has shown that, apart from formal regulations, Chinese society is largely organised by the informal rule of *guanxi* (social relation), *renqing* (favour) and *mianzi* (face) (Hwang, 1987; Yan, 1996). Social interaction among the Chinese is embedded in the network of *guanxi*, or what Fei Xiaotong calls 'differential mode of association' (see 4.2.2, Fei et al., 1992). The closer *guanxi* people get, the more favour and face are required for each side in negotiation. The vendors are clearly proficient in the art of seeking *guanxi* and manipulating face and favour. Through actively building *guanxi* with related management staff, the vendors gain bargaining chips that could be used in potential negotiation, especially when the property management staff have a certain degree of discretion in enforcement. Even the young vendor Mr. Fan told me, 'to do business, you need to know the rule of *renqing* at first'.

### **6.3.2 Scene II: Catching up the last customers**

As my shell ornaments are a kind of cultural product, I later moved to Guangzhou Bookstore, expecting the customers there will be more interested in my goods. The importance of site came to me immediately. When I was selling in spot U, I only made 1 or 2 deals in an hour. But in spot D, I made 4 to 5 deals per hour. The biggest success, however, came when I was selling in front of the entrance of a university, making more than 5 deals per hour. Obviously, college students are most easily to be drawn to my tiny exquisite ornaments. This experience reveals to me that street vending is such a space-sensitive business that requires practitioners' knowledge about the geography of a city. A good vending site leads directly to considerable profit. This is why vendors take

every chance to enter the red areas.

As mentioned in 6.2.2, the evening sees the climax of street vending in Tianhe CBD, due to the absence of chengguan. However, Spot D (Guangzhou Bookstore) is an exemption. The chengguan officers do not leave the bookstore until around 9:15 every day, when the bookstore is about to close. Therefore, we have to stay in nearby back regions and wait for the officers to leave. Once the officers leave, the vendors rush to the space in front of the entrance immediately and get ready to sell within 30 seconds, trying to catch the last wave of customers from the bookstore. Meanwhile, one or two street singers also come and start playing music. The empty square in front of the entrance soon becomes a lively market. Figure 6.11 shows the positions and kinds of vendors in this space on a typical night, including me in the bottom right. A clear spatial pattern can be observed that, as the vendors wanted to get closer to pedestrians, they all lined up along the flow of people (marked as red arrow) that went from the bookstore to the metro station. Another pattern is the spatial distribution of different categories of goods. Vendors near the bookstore were all selling cultural products, while those closer to the metro station were selling food and other stuff. This pattern shows the vendors are keenly aware of the different types of customers in different places, and actively adjust their own goods and places to better attract buyers.

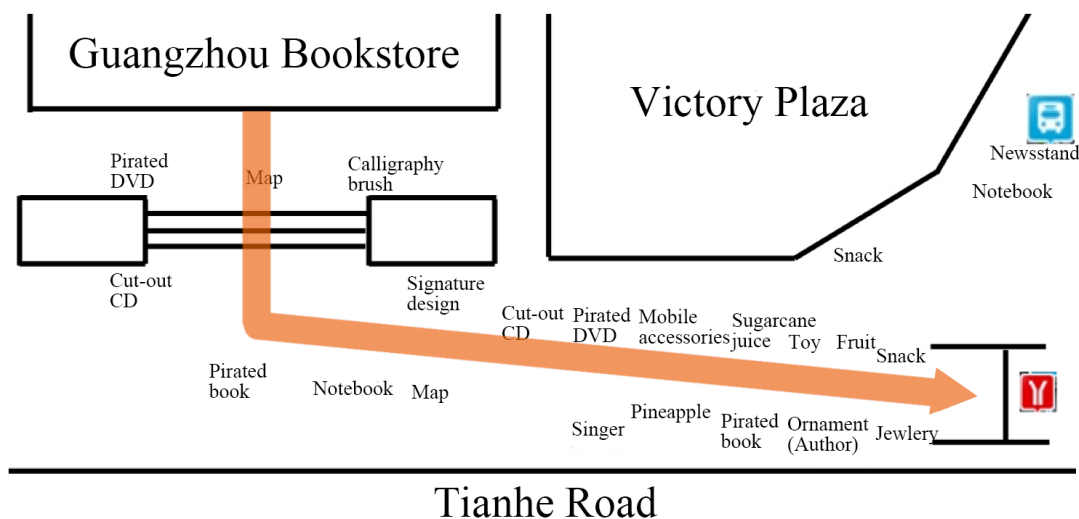


Figure 6.11 Vendors in spot D, observed on a night in August 2015

The pirated book vendors on my left were a couple who worked in a construction site in the daytime, and try to earn extra money at night by selling books. It interested me as to why they do not go to the bookstore entrance like other book vendors. They told me:

‘we are new here, only started selling a month ago, so we are not familiar with those guys. They are occupying the whole place, and we have no choice but to find somewhere else, though the business would be certainly not as good as them.’ This case exemplifies the competition between vendors (see 6.2.1).

### **6.3.3 Scene III: Encountering chengguan officers**

Although vendors do not necessarily have a close relationship with each other, they have still established a mutually assistant relationship of monitoring the chengguan officers. Once a vendor notices their arrival, he/she shouts ‘laile, laile (coming, coming)’ to signal other vendors to escape to the back stages. Their retreat is remarkably speedy. Even when they are peddling or making food, their wares and carts are in a position that is ready to be wrapped up and carried away immediately. When they notice the officers approaching, the vendors quickly disappear within a few seconds. Everyone nervously packs their wares and runs to the back stages, often leaving the customers standing at the spot. When vendors are in the back regions, they keep an eye on the officers to see if they are approaching closer or leaving. Once confirmed the officers have left, they return to the frontstage and start trading again. Such hide-and-seek games between vendors and officers is a common daily scene in Tianhe CBD, and generally in every Chinese city.

Such cooperation of guarding against officers is enabled by what Asef Bayat (1997, p. 64-66) calls a ‘passive network’. As Bayat notes, the street as a public place encourages communication and cooperation between atomised individuals, because simply being juxtaposed in the same locality implies a similar status and an identity of interests. When facing a common threat, a tacit recognition of their common identity is mediated through space, and produces a mutual-assistant relation, i.e., a passive network. Such a network is found in my fieldwork. Despite the lack of close relations, a ‘passive network’ did exist among the vendors selling in the same place. Every time I sold in a new place, nearby vendors came to chat with me and soon got acquainted. As I spent more time with them, a network surfaced – a network of weak relations that did not entail social bonding, but circulated information and enabled defensive cooperation against the chengguan officers. As a newcomer, within only an hour, I learned plenty of useful information such as the timing of officers’ arrivals, the places where they carried out strict enforcement and business experiences such as how to choose the most profitable vending site and what products sell better. We also chatted about other topics like previous jobs, plans for the future and national policies. In this way, information is

transmitted across large distances, since many vendors switch between multiple vending sites and chat with different fellows. For example, from the mouths of vendors in Tianhe CBD, I heard information about the recent crackdown on vendors in Baohua Road, which is in another district. I also heard that the reason officers strengthened enforcement in spot F was because the manager of the Sheraton Hotel had complained to the Chengguan Bureau about the vendors gathering in front of their gate. Once, a vendor in the south end of Longkouxi Road recommended me to interview another vendor selling in the north end of the road, which was some distance, yet he knew his fellow vendor well:

*He is a Guizhou (a southwestern province) person and he's been selling fried tofu for over ten years. He became famous among us because he was once interviewed by a TV channel about his tasty tofu. If you want to know about street vendors, you should go to him. He's a senior. Last month his cart was just confiscated by chengguan officers, and he had a quarrel with them.*

The social network exists not only among the vendors themselves, but also extends to some chengguan officers. Apart from the formal chengguan officers who are civil servants, the greater amount of chengguan officers are informally employed assistant officers (*xieguan*) who work as temporary workers (*linshigong*) for the chengguan bureau<sup>49</sup>. Chengguan officer Mr. Chen told me that certain bribes exist between vendors and these temporary workers. The vendors establish personal relationships through bribing to get tolerance during enforcement as well as useful information. Meanwhile, the temporary workers are more motivated to take bribes when the formal officers are absent, since they earn much less than the formal officers. Mr. Chen told me, 'sometimes vendors know in advance about our sudden attack actions, that's likely because the temps have leaked information to them'. These para-police temporary workers are close to what Michael Lipsky calls 'street-level bureaucracy' who are at the front-line of administration and have some degree of discretion on how they actually enforce the government's policies (Lipsky, 2010). Bribery can emerge among them because of the lack of supervision from above. This situation was confirmed by a porcelain vendor who told me: 'sometimes the officers take some porcelains when they

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<sup>49</sup> The temporary employment of *linshi gong* is a prevalent phenomenon in China's corporations and governmental departments. The temporaries are not formal staffs of the institution, and are not protected by the national social security system. They mostly engage in strenuous or dangerous manual works for minimum wage.

like, and I just let it go, you know, to build *renqing* (personal relationship) with them. They will give you *mianzi* (face) when you give them *mianzi*.'

The softening of chengguan's hardline approach law enforcement, as suggested by recent research Huang, et al (2014), was also confirmed in my interviews. However, the long-existing image of chengguan officers' vicious law enforcement remains in street vendor's mind. All my interviewees have more or less experienced chengguan's forcible confiscation. When asked about attitudes to chengguan, they mostly expressed discontent and fear:

*They come and smash your cart and take your stuff, like bandits! I have been robbed of my cart over 10 times ... probably 20 times, and I have to make a new cart by myself every time. I could make a fortune if there's no chengguan.*

*It's really dark, the chengguan. Once if they want to take your stuff, there's nothing you can do. If you ever touch them, that's a 'violent resistance to law' which puts you in detention and thousands of Yuan of compensation fee. Many of my friends got detained for weeks simply because they want to keep their wares.*

Meanwhile, some vendors expressed a certain degree of understanding:

*You have to give them some face, and be compliant when they are here. That's the wise way — after all, they are not going to stay long, and we can start selling again when they leave.*

*Chengguan used to be unreasonable and brutal. I was beaten by them many times. They are more civilised now, after the case of Sun Zhigang (see 6.5.2). But I still fear them ... Who knows? You'd better be careful.*

Chengguan officer Mr. He told me about the transformation of law enforcement practice:

*Our image is pretty negative now. The media always selectively report news like 'chengguan officers hit and robbed vendors again'. Even during our law enforcement, we are often blamed by passers-by, saying we are 'cruel', 'brutal',*

*'leaving no chance for the poor'. So we are actually in a weak position. Now our law enforcement is mostly based on persuasion, and avoid stirring things up. Otherwise the public opinion would be rather unfavourable to us.*

The change to soft approach largely resulted from the pressure of public sympathy on street vendors and outrage on chengguan's brutal eviction, and it echoes the global findings of a post-revanchist turn (Murphy, 2009; Mackie et al., 2014). However, it is unclear whether the new approach will be continued in the long term, because it largely depends on the will of the leader.

## **6.4 Implicit and explicit resistance**

Compared with the openly organised resistance in some countries (e.g. India: Anjaria, 2006; Etzold, 2013; Mexico: Cross & Morales, 2007; Crossa, 2014), Chinese vendors cope with the government in a low-profile and individualised way. Direct conflict is to be carefully avoided, because the vendors know they do not have the advantage to clash with officers. Organised resistance occurs, but is rare. It was reported in 2009 that the Shangxiajiu pedestrian street was crowded by some 700 vendors who were organised into several gangs based on their origin place, each occupying its own territory and excluding outsiders. There were bosses behind the vendors who controlled the distribution of their income and labour division. Different vendors were assigned different tasks, some selling goods, some guarding against officers. When officers arrived, there were vendors in charge of obstructing officers' enforcement as well as vendors in charge of assisting other vendors to escape. They were even equipped with intercoms in order to notify other vendors to run away (Xinxin Qi, 2009; Quan, 2009). The 'passive network' among atomised vendors here becomes an 'active network' which enabled consciously organised defence and resistance. Similar collectively organised vendor resistance was also documented in other countries (Crossa, 2009).

Active networks are more prevalent among some minority vendor groups. Although the majority of street vendors are Han (China's major ethnicity), there are a few ethnic minorities engaging in street vending, the Uyghurs and Tibetans being the most common ones. Their goods mostly comprise ethnic food, clothes or jewellery. Different from the Han vendors' individualised situation, the minority vendors mostly have a strong network and organisation. Because of their special ethnic identity, these vendors are treated differently by chengguan officers. Officer Li told me:

*Although the Uyghurs are scattered in different places, they are all connected and organised, like gangs. To them, we manage as little as we can. For one thing, the government is trying to ease ethnic conflicts. For another, they are tough to manage, and if you push too hard, they may resist violently. Many of them have knife with them.*

Such soft approach to ethnic minorities is also found in other research (Flock and Breitung, 2016).

In the suburbs, the resistance becomes more explicit. Officer He told me ‘the DVD trades in Dashi area, Panyu district are monopolised by vendors from Henan province. They not only gang up on their competitors, but also resist our enforcement openly. Many of them hide knives under their DVD box.’ A few of my interviewees have heard of these gangs as well. Mr. Sun, an experienced vendor, told me those gangs charge protection fees other vendors if they want to sell in their territories, which are the most profitable places. A riot in Zengcheng District in 2011 gathered thousands of vendors who torched government buildings and smashed police vehicles because of chengguan officers’ abuse of a pregnant female vendor. The crowd was finally dispersed by police and militia who fired tear gas guns on vendors (Pomfret, 2011).

However, aside from occasional open resistance, street vendors’ main survival strategy for most of the time is what Bayat (1997, p. 57) calls a ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’, namely, an insubordination that appears to be obedient but silently encroaches into the loopholes of the system and defies the power-imposed order on a micro scale. From above-mentioned location-specific tactics to building personal relationships, vendors’ everyday forms of resistance are trivial yet remarkably tenacious. It is through the skilful utilisation of these strategies that the vendors are able to poach on the forbidden territories and carve out their living spaces in the city. These tactics are what de Certeau calls the ‘know-how’ of daily practices that enable weak individuals to circumvent structural restrictions and achieve their subjectivities within organisational power structures (De Certeau, 1984, p. 65). Although their victories are situational, momentary, fragmented, and to be abandoned at any time, the vendors are able to come back again and again at a low cost. It is such ‘extended, guerrilla-style, defensive campaigns of attrition’ (Scott, 2008, p. xvii) that eventually exhaust the authorities, undermine the law enforcement agencies, and to a certain extent, render the exclusionary strategies ineffective.

As a result, the government's plan to build high-end, modern landscapes in this downtown CBD is thwarted. The Tianhe CBD is planned as a city centre with a modern environment. The buildings here are all designed in a modern style, with steel frameworks and glass curtain walls. It is designed as a transportation hub with 8-lane roads running by and many metro stations, as well as a business hub with office buildings leased to global top enterprises, international banks and a large Sheraton hotel. To create a middle-class shopping centre, the Teemall has put a lot of effort to build a stylish, high-end environment. The Teemall plaza is installed with musical fountains and swept by cleaners every day; windows are wiped glossy and shiny; huge LED screens play commercials day and night. For the planners and business owners in the CBD, street vending is the opposite of their imagination for this area. The pervasive road economy of street vending was blamed by planners because it 'lowers Guangzhou's business level and wastes the precious business resources in the downtown area', 'spoils Guangzhou's urban environment in general, ruins the taste of urban development, and attracts mostly the uneducated, low-skill floating population' (H. Yang, 2002, p. 72). However, when it comes to practice, the elite spatial imagination is set back by the ocean of individuals struggling for livelihood. Just as millions of anthozoan polyps can create a coral reef that sinks a ship (Scott, 2008, p. 36), the ceaseless petty resistant acts of vendors can create barriers to the implementation of revanchist policies, and convert the top-down planned modern landscape into spontaneous lively street markets.

## **6.5 Entering the world of street vendors**

The case of Tianhe CBD exemplifies how street vending survives and thrives in a strictly regulated city centre. While vending activities are highly visible, the everyday lives of vendors are rather invisible to most residents. This section digs into street vendors' everyday urban experience by exploring their residence, commute, walking, spatial cognition, place identity, household, and the translocal life maintained across rural and urban areas.

### **6.5.1 Residence**

Although street vendors are highly visible in the city, their residence is rather invisible. They live in 3 types of residence. Those who hold urban hukou usually have properties in the city. Those who plant, produce and go to the city everyday have their farms and dwellings in the suburbs. However, the majority of vendors (34 out of 40 interviewees) are holding rural hukou and living in the city without their own properties. Unable to



afford the high rents of the urban housing market, vendors can only find cheap rental housing in the many urban villages in Guangzhou. Urban villages, or *chengzhongcun* (literally ‘village in the city’), are former rural communities that have been encircled by decades of urban sprawl but not yet incorporated into urban governance, because according to Chinese land property law, rural land is owned by the village collectives rather than the state (Zhang et al., 2003). They somewhat resemble the shanty towns in other countries, in that they are less urbanised areas amid the surrounding rapidly developing urban areas, usually with decayed housing conditions and problematic public safety. Research has shown that there were 277 urban villages with approximately 1 million inhabitants in Guangzhou in 2000 (Zhang et al., 2003). Since the owners of urban villages have built plenty of inexpensive housing units for rent, they become the only affordable shelter for most street vendors.

Figure 6.12 shows the residences of the 32 vendors I interviewed in Tianhe CBD. Every day, they converge from their homes in different corners of the city to Tianhe CBD by car, tricycle or by foot and go back at night. As the commute is routinised on a daily basis, this movement constitutes a city-level spatial regionalisation. The deprived urban villages scattered across the city are the ‘periphery’ where the city ‘outsiders’ live, and the CBD is the ‘centre’ where the ‘establishment’ dominates and excludes outsiders. These peripheries are back stages where the surveillance of power does not penetrate, while the centre is front stage where space is imagined by the authorities as a locus of modernity.

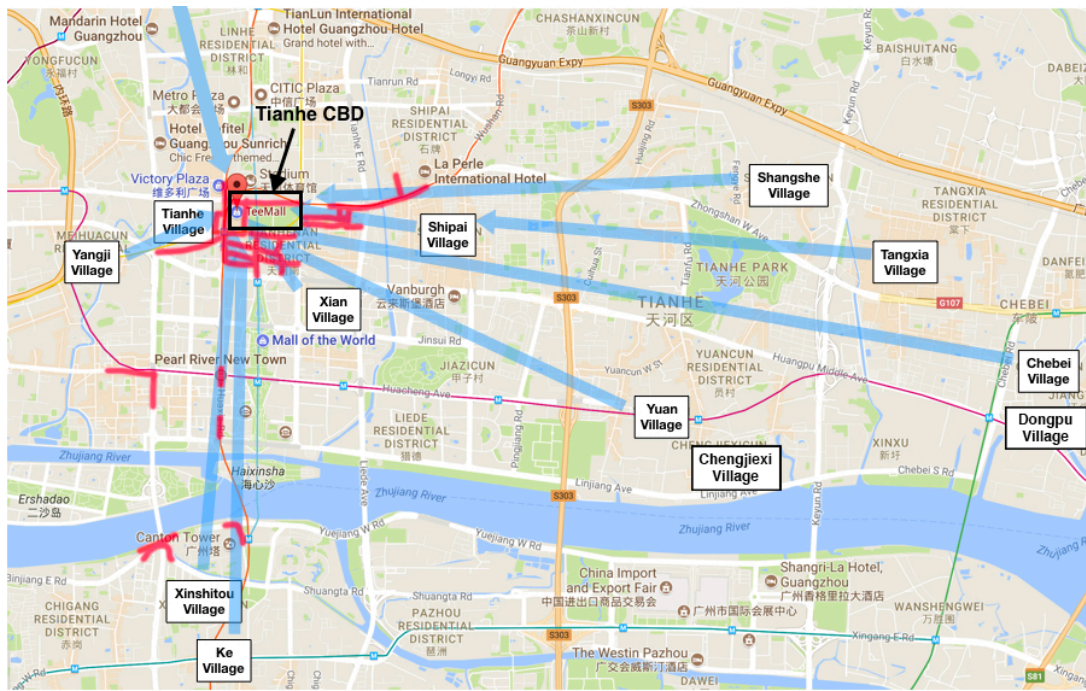


Figure 6.12 Vendors' daily routes of commute (blue arrows) and range of vending activities (red areas).

Urban villages lack government control, whether in terms of infrastructure construction or chengguan's administration. Research has shown that, due to the loose regulation and high demand for low-end products, urban villages usually gather various informal economies, covering retail, catering and service. In this way, urban villages provide both housing and employment for informal workers. The informal economy of street vending and the informal housing of the urban villages constitute a symbiotic ecology (D. Xue & Huang, 2008; X. Yin et al., 2009). This is similar to the immigrant communities in other countries where the informal economy is often found thriving (Sassen, 1994). Every urban village is a crowded vending site. Many vendors in Tianhe CBD told me that they sometimes sell around their home if they do not want to go far. Below are some photos of the urban village.



Figure 6.13 Street vendors in the urban village

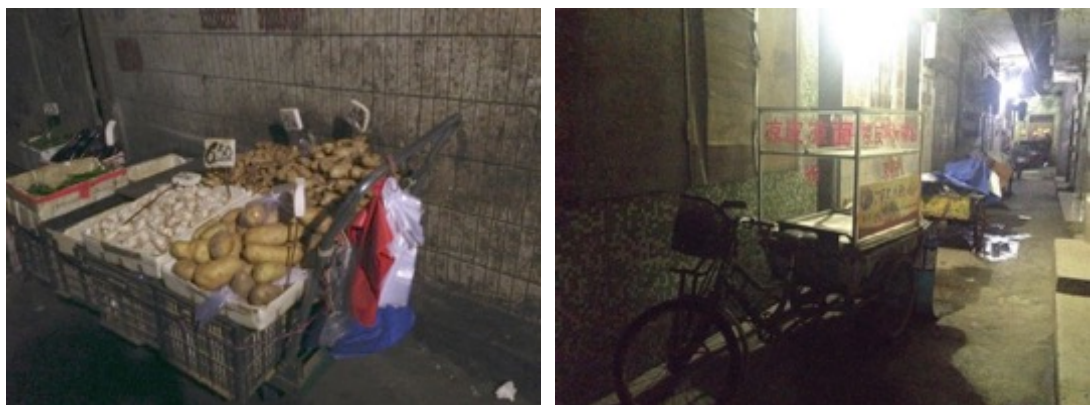


Figure 6.14 Tricycles parked in urban villages. Vendors drive them to the city centre every day.



Figure 6.15 Interior of a vendor's home, full of wares to sell.



### 6.5.2 Wandering and spatial cognition

As mentioned before, vendors have multiple different vending sites and switch between them from time to time. The space between these vending sites sets the range of daily mobility of a vendor. Some vendors have a limited range of activity in the city. For instance, a vendor who has lived in Guangzhou for 5 years told me, 'I only know the way from Xian Village to here (Tianhe CBD). I often get lost once I go to other places.' However, the majority of my interviewees are more mobile. Figure 6.12 has mapped out the alternative vending sites of vendors in Tianhe CBD. It can be seen that most alternative sites are stretching out from the CBD to its nearby street network, whereas some vendors also go further away to other districts. Because of chengguan officers' frequent harassment in daytime, most vendors have to move constantly to avoid being caught before settling in one place at night when the officers leave. With portable vending tools such as shoulder poles or suitcases and vehicle such as tricycles (often motorised), pushcarts or cars (often adapted into a vending stall), vendors can easily wander in the city and choose a place to peddle (see Figure 6.16). These tools constitute the most outstanding visual images of street vendors. They distance vendors from the crowd, and reveal their identity of 'street vendor' to others at a glance. It is through these images that passers-by know what they can buy from them; it is also through these looks that chengguan officers can differentiate vendors from other pedestrians.

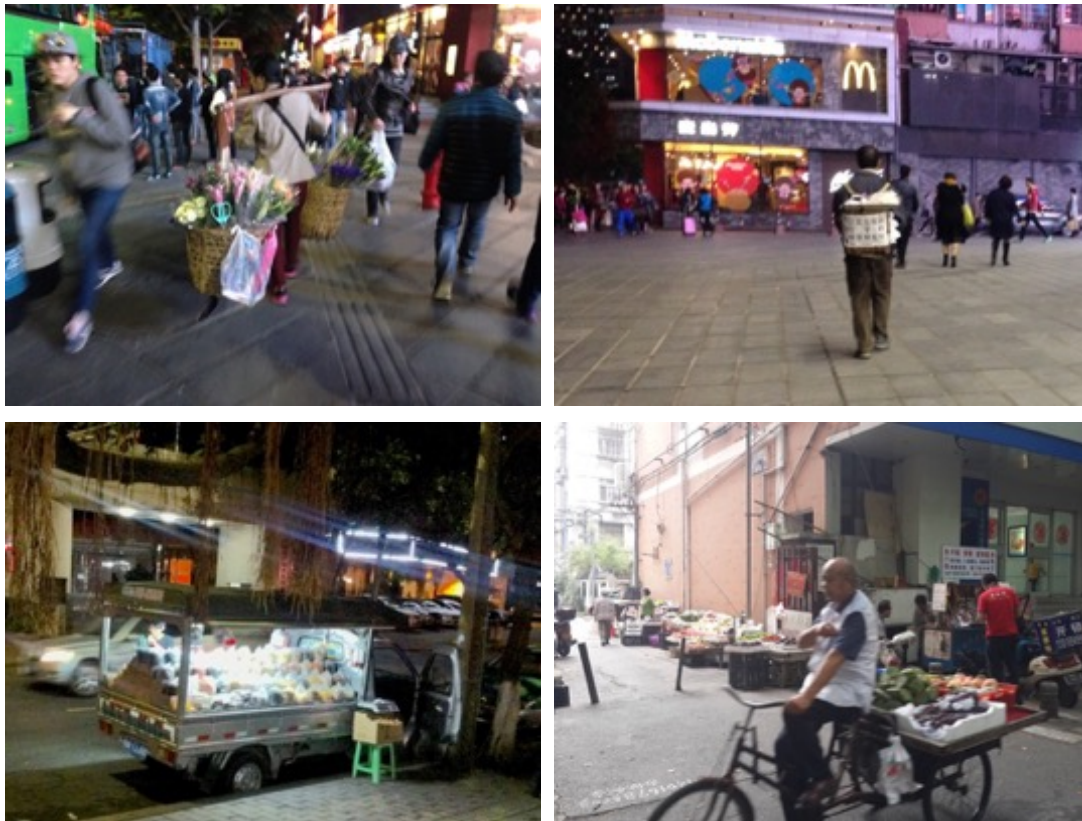


Figure 6.16 Various means of transport

Such constant mobile experience reminds us of Charles Baudelaire's concept of the *flâneur*, a character who constantly idles through city streets and observes the flux and transience of modern urban life. Despite the different economic and cultural classes between the two figures, there are parallels between the *flâneur* and the street vendor in the sense that a *flâneur* 'establish[es] his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite' (Baudelaire, 2010, p. 400). Street vendors, as they try to gain access to customers, also choose to peddle in the most crowded places and spend much of their time in the throng. Like the *flâneur*, they also stroll in the street and experience the bustle of urban life. In Baudelaire's writing, such idling is the core of modern experience, for only in the idling of the *flâneur* is 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent' (Baudelaire, 2010, p. 420) of modernity first experienced.

As Marshall Berman notes, city streets are the primal scene of modernity, the place where 'modern sensibility is born' (Berman, 1988, p. 18). Vendors, whose livelihood is earned in the street, could be said to have the closest relations with the city street compared to other urban figures. A question to be asked, then, is do they have the sensitivity to modern experience? To some extent, they do. Some vendors are interested observers of the city, and therefore strolling from street to street is somewhat entertaining for them. When asked if he has any entertainment, a vendor said:

*I don't have much time aside from peddling. Peddling counts as the entertainment for me. I like to see different places. When I get bored selling in one place, I'll find new places to peddle.*

Street vending is not a demanding job; it allows time to chat with other vendors, use mobile phones, loiter around, and observe the surroundings and passers-by. An appreciation of modern urban settings was often heard in my interviews, especially among the younger interviewees:

*I don't like to sell in the suburbs, [because] those places are too desolate and dreary. Here (Tianhe CBD) is much more interesting, with all the malls and high-rises. This is what a metropolis is like.*

Nonetheless, street vendors do not resemble *flâneurs* in the sense that the latter is intrinsically a bourgeois, bohemian figure, a man who roams the city solitarily out of

intellectual cynicism and aesthetic sensibilities. The saunter of street vendors is never driven by intellectual reason, but by the concern of livelihood. For vendors, their wandering is not a leisure but their means of livelihood. Interestingly, here the street vendors resemble *flâneurs* again – in the sense that they have a similar dual identity of ‘observer–participant’, which is part of the character of a *flâneur*. Having lived in the city for years, the vendors have familiarised themselves with their surroundings and participated in urban life through conducting business, but in the end, they are still outside spectators of the city. As will be elaborated in 6.5.4, social, institutional and economic barriers have hindered them from further integrating into urban society.

The same city appears differently to different people. Research has shown that occupation, length of residence, mobility and travel mode influence urban dwellers’ way of structuring the spatiality of a city (Appleyard, 1970). Given street vendors’ distinctive mode of life, I proceed to find out whether it affects their spatial cognition by exploring their cognitive map. A cognitive map, or mental map, first proposed by Edward Tolman, is an internal representation of the spatial layout of the outside environment (Tolman, 1948). Since Kevin Lynch, sketch mapping has become a dominant method to externalise cognitive maps (Lynch, 1960). Sketch mapping allows the researcher to see the world through the eyes of the informant. To find out how the street vendors see the city, I encouraged my interviewees to draw maps of Guangzhou as much as possible. The results differed, based on the different life patterns of the interviewees.

### A. Sequential mapping

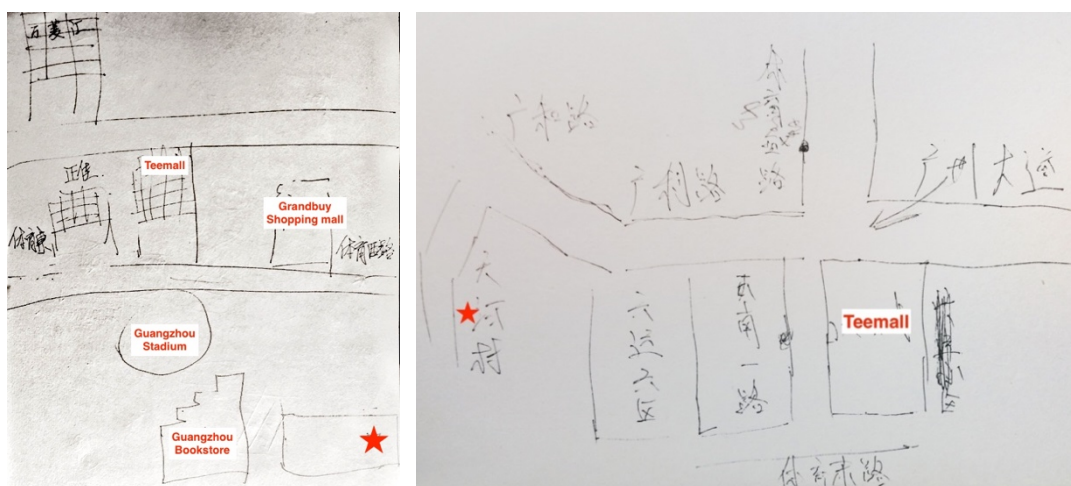


Figure 6.17 Sequential cognitive maps

In Figure 6.17, the left map shows only the Tianhe CBD, because it is the only place the

interviewee has visited in the city aside from his home for the last two years. The buildings are laid along the road in the correct sequence, but without reflection of distance and other details. His residence is marked out (with a red star), but lacks an appropriate scale. The right map is also centred in Tianhe CBD, but with a broader range, because the area is the main road between the interviewee's residence (Tianhe Village, the red star) and the place he peddles (Teemall). Aside from Teemall and Tianhe Village, all other names are road names, which probably indicates that he does not pay attention to other buildings except the place he peddles, but the roads that he takes every day are the most familiar to him.

Appleyard categorised two types of mental map: *sequential*, which structures space topologically, with elements like paths (streets and roads) and nodes (activity centres); and *spatial*, which structures space positionally, reflecting the locations of things (individual buildings, landmarks, districts). Following a gradation from rough to accurate, a sequential map is divided into four subtypes: fragments, chains, branch and loop, and network. Meanwhile, a spatial map is divided into four subtypes: scattered, mosaic, linked and patterned (Appleyard, 1970). The left map in Figure 6.17 shows typical 'chain' mapping, a primitive subtype of sequential mapping, because it is organised around the two straight roads and strings roadside buildings on them. The right map belongs to chain mapping as well, but the angled roads give more positional information.

## **B. Spatial mapping**

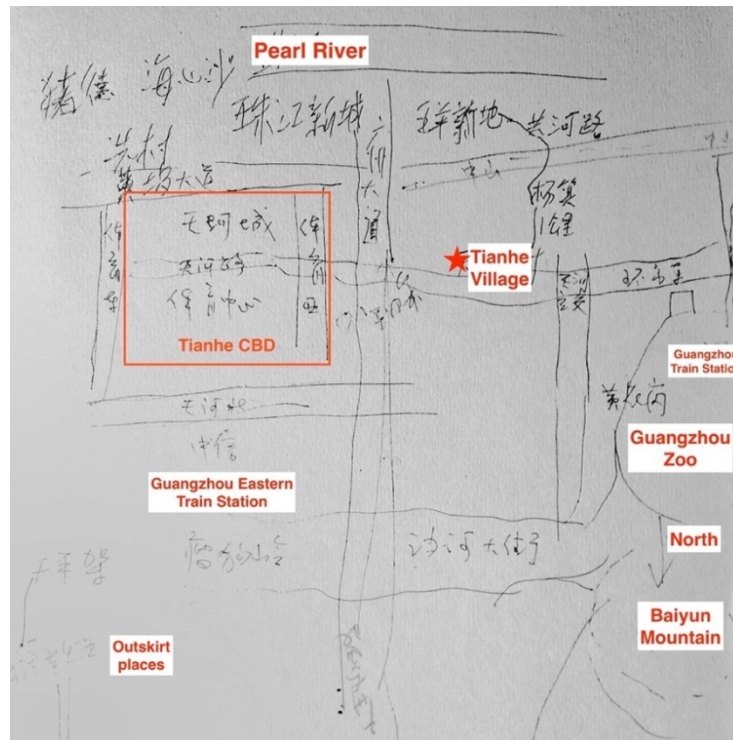


Figure 6.18 Spatial cognitive map

Figure 6.18 shows a more detailed and well-structured spatial cognition and memory of a large urban area. This is because the vendor rides a motorised tricycle, which gives him a much broader view than the previous two vendors who commute by walking. Instead of the linear organisation in Figure 6.17, this map shows spatial thinking by positioning Tianhe CBD in a broad urban area, with distorted scale but correct order relation. Although its skeleton is given by the road network, the circles around Guangzhou Zoo and Baiyun Mountain express spatial sizes, and there is a direction indicator pointing to the north. Therefore, this map can be categorised into ‘linked’ mapping, a subtype of spatial mapping that employs combinations of sequential and spatial mapping. The most detailed part is the area around Tianhe CBD and Tianhe Village, because the vendor has been peddling and living there for the last 3 years. He also outlined the southern part near Pearl River, because he sometimes goes for a walk on the river bank. At the lower left, he put some place names of remote outskirts, which are detached from the urban area (in this sense it is also a form of ‘mosaic’ mapping in Appleyard’s categorisation), because that is where he stocks every month. He also specially points out the two train stations, where he takes the train to his home village every year.

### C. More accomplished mapping



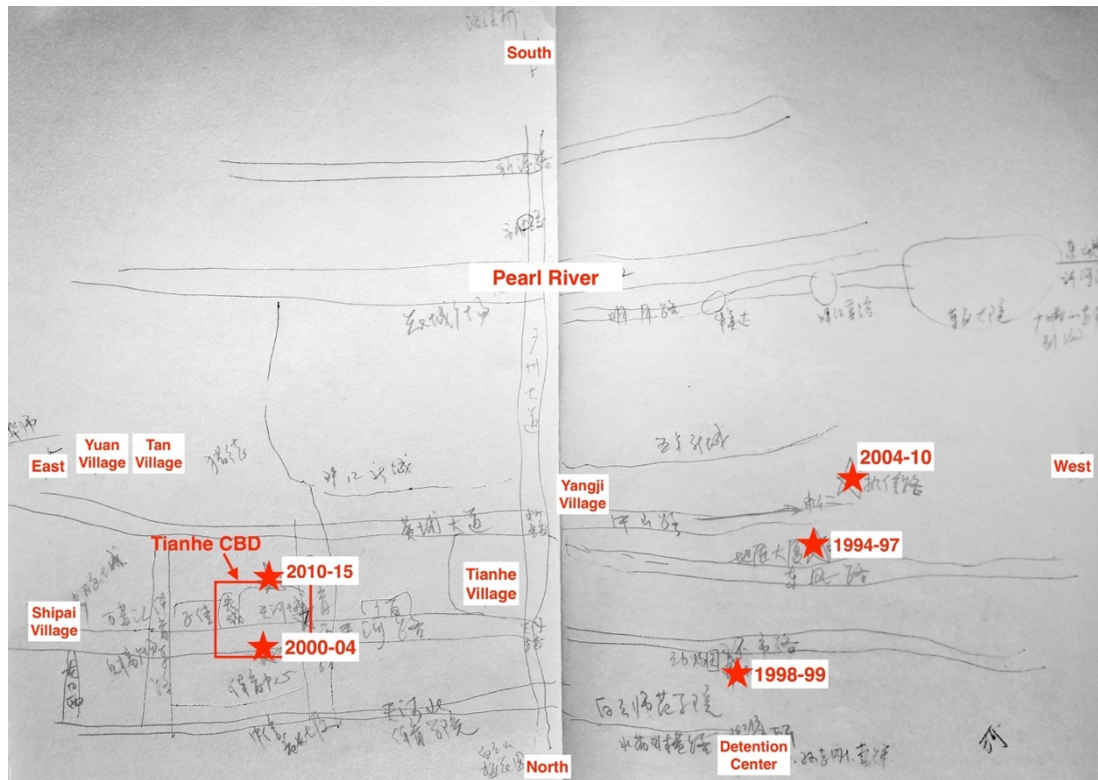


Figure 6.19 More accomplished cognitive map

This map is drawn by a ‘senior’ vendor, Mr. Sun, who has been living in Guangzhou for over 20 years. Mr. Sun impressed me with his rich knowledge of a much larger area – larger than any of the previous maps – of the city. He had such an extensive spatial memory that covered the main body of the whole urban area, in which Tianhe CBD only occupies a small spot. Notably, he paid more attention to the overall structure and scale than filling details, and had reflected a proper distance between places. As the drawing continued, he was forced to distort the scale and eventually stopped drawing because two pages of my sketchbook was not big enough to put his memory. One reason for Mr. Sun’s remarkable spatial knowledge is that he has driven a motorised tricycle to peddle over the years, which has enabled his high mobility and resulted in his road-based spatial cognition. As he was mapping out the city, he recalled the places he has peddled in over the past 20 years (marked with stars and years in the map), and talked about the dramatic changes the city has witnessed over the past two decades:

*When I first came, I sold sugarcane and pineapple. At that time, there was no such thing as ‘chengguan’. Vendors were everywhere, all over the street. I lived in Zhumu Market, which is today’s Zhujiang New Town (Guangzhou’s new city centre), but at that time it was just vegetable fields and pig farms, with only*

*asbestos house to live in. I stock from Liede Village — at that time it was called ‘Yumin Xincun’ (Fishermen’s New Village) — where farmers sold their produces in boat. Later, the market was demolished, and I moved to Tianhe Road, also lived in those cheap XX houses. Several years later, that place was also demolished, and I moved to Yangji Village. Although Yangji is all developed today, at that time it was just a poor village. When it’s also demolished, I moved to my current home, Tianhe Village. I don’t know how long can I stay because it was reported that the government is going to demolish Tianhe Village as well.*

We can see that Mr. Sun’s residence was pushed hither and thither by the demolition of urban villages in Guangzhou’s 20-year history of urban construction and expansion. He also talked fondly of how the Citic Plaza, today’s city landmark, was built from the ground up in the 1990s, and pointed to me the location of the already abandoned old airport. The map is not merely a spatial representation, but filled with his memory of the city’s past and his personal life course that has changed along with the city’s transformation.

Although Mr. Sun did not add many details on the map, he particularly pointed out two things. One is the many urban villages he used to live in, another one is the detention centre in the far south. The detention centre is where Sun Zhigang was detained under China’s custody and repatriation law and was beaten to death. Sun Zhigang was a designer who worked in Guangzhou but with a Wuhan hukou. According to Chinese law, the floating population (residents without local hukou) who have lived in the city for more than 3 days have to apply for a temporary living permit, otherwise the police have the right to detain them and send them back to their registered place. In 2003, he was picked up by police in the street to check his residence permit. Unable to produce a temporary residence permit, he was sent to the custody and repatriation centre, where he died after being beaten. The case of Sun Zhigang aroused huge controversy both in China and abroad (BBC, 2003; Yu, 2013). Mr. Sun showed deep sympathy to Sun Zhigang, because ‘he is the martyr of our floating population. Only after his death did the government start to treat us better, in law making and law enforcement.’ Moreover, he has many street vendor friends who were also detained in the same place and have experienced similar violence:

*That’s why I know the place: I went there many times waiting for my friends to be released. It was terrible. They beat them in the detention centre, and you can*

*do nothing but wait. It is after the death of Sun Zhigang in 2003 that the government started to treat us floating population better. It directly affected on all of us street vendors. It can be said that our safety in the city today is traded by Sun Zhigang's death.*

All 4 sketches are dominantly structured by roads, which confirms the importance of the walking experience in vendors' everyday lives. Hotels, shopping malls or gated communities are marked as well, but the vendors have never entered these places – they know these places only because their entrances are their vending sites.

The sketches above also reveal the influence of duration of residence on spatial cognition. For Appleyard, there is an evolutionary process of different mental maps. Over time, there should be a shift from the more primitive sequential/topological mapping to the more advanced spatial/positional mapping. Golledge (1978) described a similar urban cognitive process in which '... people develop from a route-mapping stage, involving a network of major nodes and links, to a survey-mapping stage, involving a knowledge of both the areas and the interconnections between them' (Cadwallader, 1985, pp. 182-183). These models generally concur with my data. The two maps in Figure 6.17 are primitive, sequential maps, and are drawn by two vendors who have been living in Guangzhou for respectively 2 and 5 years. The range of their activities in the city are largely within the blocks they mapped, because their spatial knowledge has limited their orientation and navigation in other parts of the city. Figure 6.18 is a spatial map that views urban space in two-dimensional interconnections rather than in a one-dimensional linear order, and it is drawn by a vendor with 8 years of residence in Guangzhou. Figure 6.19, the most accomplished one, is drawn by a vendor whose prolonged 20-year stay in Guangzhou gives him an overview of the whole urban area. His rich mobility experience enables him to depict not only particular spots, but the overall spatial scale. In turn, the rich knowledge on urban spatiality also enables him to navigate freely in the city.

#### **6.5.4 Sense of place**

The above sections have shown a close relation between street vendors and the city. Street vendors spend much of their time strolling through urban space and interacting with urban residents and officers. A question to be raised then, is does such urban experience yield any sense of place for the vendors? Or in other words, what does the city as a *place* mean to these rural-to-urban migrants? Sense of place refers to a bonding

between human beings and place that is formed through long-term place experiences (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974, 1977). It is composed of multiple dimensions such as place attachment, place identity, place dependence, etc. This section seeks to find out the emotional relation of vendors to the city with regards of above aspects.

As place-based social contact plays a central role in the sense of belonging of a place, I will start with a survey of the street vendors' social network. As shown in Figure 6.20, over half of the interviewees have no more than 3 acquaintances in the city. This data suggests a rather segregated social life from the local population.

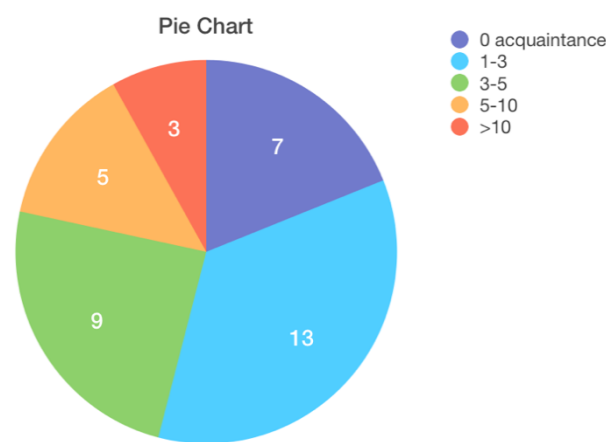


Figure 6.20 Number of acquaintances in the city

The acquaintances are mostly *lao xiang*, fellows from the same native place. Literature has shown the vital role of native-place networks among Chinese migrant workers (L. Zhang, 2001, p. 31). Fellows from the same region are thought to be trustworthy among migrants in a strange place. The closeness of the *lao xiang* relationship is largely determined by the geographical distance of their native places. Vendors from the same province find it easier to become friends, while vendors from the same or nearby village are more intimate and usually knew each other before they went to the city. 18 of 37 interviewees have this kind of village-level *lao xiang*. They dine, drink, play poker, stock, and sell together, which constitutes most of their social lives in the city. In the digital age, these networks are also maintained online. 28 of the 40 interviewees have 'native-place groups' in their mobile social app, where hundreds of province-level *lao xiang* chat and exchange information.

If *lao xiang* means a vendor's social life, then family is his 'point of reference'. Among the 37 migrant street vendors I asked, 7 are living in the city with partners; 21 have

partners living in the village; whilst the rest are unmarried and live alone in the city. Their families are maintained across the home village and the city. Even for those living in the city with partners, it is impossible for them to bring their parents, because of the high living costs of urban life. Most of the children are left in the village to be looked after by their grandparents. Only two of my interviewees lived with their kids in the city, but when they are of school age, they will have to return to the village because the tuition fees in the city are unaffordable for them. Vendor Mr. Sun told me:

*It's not that we want to come to the city. It's we can't survive simply by farming. Recently our province had a terrible drought, the crops all died. So I have to come to the city to earn a livelihood. I surely don't want to leave my wife and kids in the village, but it is beyond my economic ability to bring them to the city.*

As a result, most of them travel back to their home villages regularly (see Figure 6.21). Meanwhile, all my interviewees send or bring back around half of their income to support their families' daily expenses and their kids' education.

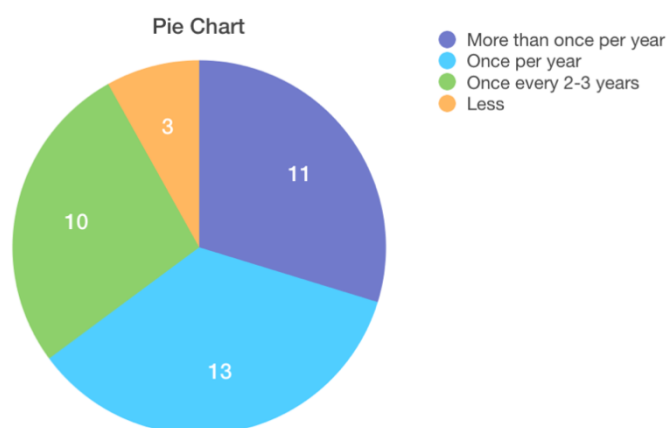


Figure 6.21 Frequency of home visiting

While vendors support their rural families economically, the latter support them with emotional and social support. As mentioned above, vendors do not have many acquaintances in the city. The main source of emotional support comes from contact with their rural family through phone calls or social mobile apps. Moreover, family or kin members provide most of street vendors' social support in the city. The family or kin-based network is vital 'social capital' for vendors' lives in the city because networks 'lower the costs and risks of movement' (Massey et al., 1999, p. 42). In my interview, 14 of 37 vendors chose to migrate to Guangzhou because they have kin members or fellow

villagers already living in Guangzhou who can provide them initial information and assistance to settle in the city. Such chain migration can be found in other countries (Bork-Hüffer et al., 2016; Das, 2003; Massey et al., 1999).

Thus, the households of street vendors are maintained across the village and the city through home visits, money transfers, phone contacts, and kin-based networks in the city. The household and the family-based network constitute the centre of vendors' social lives in the city. Outside the realm of the household, street vendors remain largely segregated from urban society, even after years and decades of living in it. All my interviewees categorically rejected the suggestion when I asked them if they saw themselves as urbanites:

*Me: Do you think you are a Guangzhou citizen?*

*Vendor: (Surprised) Are you kidding me? We vendors are just peddling here. We don't have that ability to be an urbanite, for sure. I still belong to my native place.*

*Me: Why?*

*Vendor: Because my family is there. The city has nothing for me.*

*Me: How long do you plan to stay in Guangzhou in the future?*

*Vendor: I don't know... I'm going to stay here for more years, earn as much money as I can, and go back – probably when my kids are grown up.*

Mr. Xu, who has been street vending for 20 years, said:

*It's impossible to be a citizen here, because street vending is not a formal job. For 20 years I am just renting temporary houses in urban villages. Guangzhou is like a second hometown for me after 20 years of living here, but I certainly do not count as a Guangzhou citizen — after all, my wife and kids are still in village, and I have to go back when I'm old.*

We can see from the narration above that the rural family holds indubitable significance in vendors' sense of belonging. The place identity, for some, is bound to the home village. The village is not only their past, but also the place they visit from time to time, and the place they will return to when they are old. For others, however, their identity is more ill-defined and drifts between the village and the city. Like Mr. Xu said, Guangzhou has become a 'second hometown' for him, since he has lived in the city for decades. This kind of identity is more common among the younger generation, who

have never engaged in agriculture and yearn for urban life (Wang, 2001).

### 6.5.5 Floating population, translocal life

The previous section has shown that, rather than settling *in* the city, street vendors live a life *between* the country and the city. Such in-between situation could be described as ‘translocal’ to refer to its interconnectedness between the place of origin and place of destination. Moreover, the notion of translocality involves a holistic perspective on mobilities which is concerned with not only the flow of people but also the flows of resources, ideas, symbols, etc. (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013). From this perspective, Figure 6.22 illustrates the dynamics of street vendors’ translocal lives with different circular flows that transcend three places.

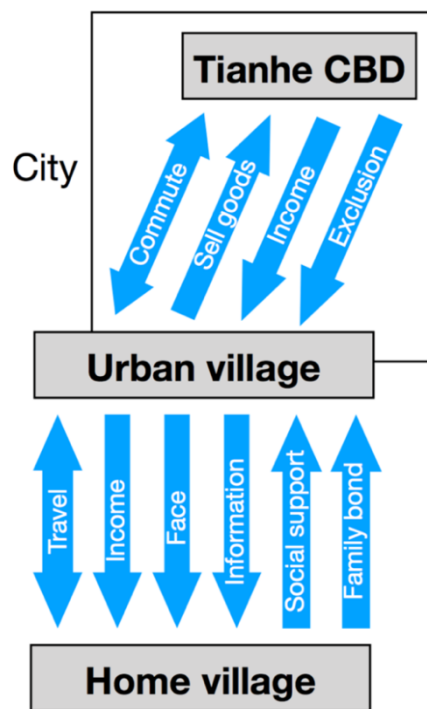


Figure 6.22 Circular dynamics of translocal life of street vendors in Guangzhou

Tianhe CBD, the centre of Guangzhou city, is the workplace where vendors commute to every day and conduct business. Urban village, a peripheral place in the city, is the locale of labour power reproduction that provides migrants affordable housing not far from the city centre, and thus enables their daily business. Home village is the place where vendors’ family members (parents, kids, and possibly wives of male vendors) live and where they send income and pay visits to from time to time. In turn, the family bond of home village and the social support it provides to vendors ties them to their place of

origin.

While vendors experience exclusion from the city, their urban experience gives them face when they return to their village. A young vendor, Mr. Fan, told me that nowadays staying in the village 'is considered to show lack of ambition and motivation.' For them, successfully living in a megacity like Guangzhou is an achievement to be proud of, and allows them to 'have face' (*you mianzi*) when they return to their home villages. As C. K. Yang (1945) notes, one source of gaining face is an inequality of social status. On the one hand, the city occupies a place of cultural superiority; urban culture is chased after and imitated by rural migrants (G. Lei, 2003). On the other hand, migrant workers earn the major share of their family's income; a saying goes, 'one man enters city, the whole family shake off poverty' (Tan, 2011, p. 139). Therefore, living in the city means mobility towards a higher social position for the villagers. What they bring back to the village is not only money, but also information about opportunities in the city and a 'translocal imagination' (Brickell & Datta, 2011, p. 18), namely, the admiration of the urban culture and modernity of Guangzhou. These flows of information and vision play a role in creating a channel for further migration. Through these flows and circulations of body, money, symbol, information and ideas, the lives of vendors are translocally maintained across the city and the village. Their 'migration' is not a one-way, one-time *movement* from one place to another, but a two-way constant *interconnection* between the country and the city.

Such translocal migration has a socio-economical background. As Liang Zai notes, the rise of China's temporary migration is largely the result of its transition to a market economy and the continuing legacy of the apartheid-like hukou system (Z. Liang, 2001). Hukou, the household registration system, is an institutionalised rural-urban division that has been in place since the Socialist period; it provides the right of education, employment, housing, healthcare and social security only to urban residents (citizens with urban hukou) but not to the rural population. China's urbanisation has been criticised as a nominal rather than substantial change (Chan, 2012), because although it has been proceeding rapidly for decades, it has failed to entitle those who live in the city without urban hukou to have corresponding urban rights. Being institutionally differentiated from urban residents and denied from a series of hukou-based rights, the migrants experience a 'second-class' citizenship (Honig, 1992; Whyte, 2010, Chapter 3) and face difficulties to be integrated into urban society. Hence, they are forced to travel to and fro between the city they work in and the village where their family live. These



migrants are officially called the ‘floating population’ (*liudong renkou*) (Chang, 1996; Liang & Ma, 2004), which refers to their diasporic situation between the city and village<sup>50</sup>. The floating population constitutes a significant part of the actual body of China’s urban population (See Fig. 6.23). In 2016, there were 247 million floating population, constituting 31% of the whole urban population<sup>51</sup>.

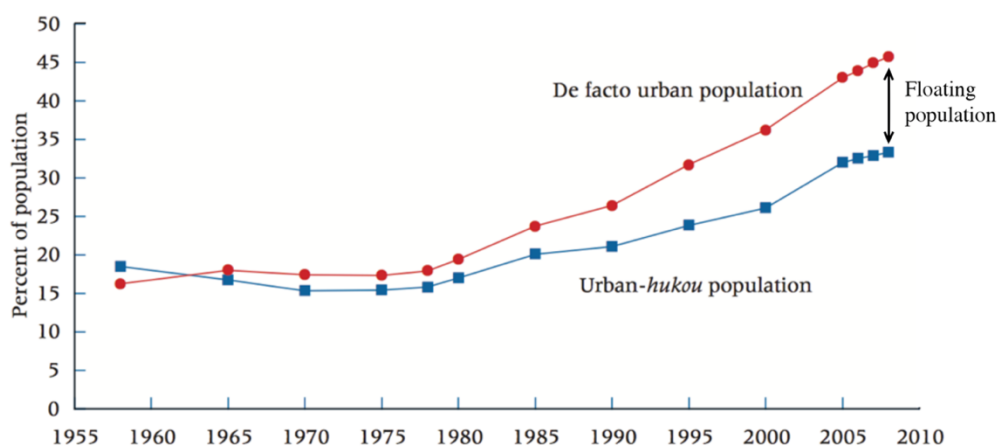


Figure 6.23 Percentage of registered and de facto urban population in China, 1958-2008, cited from Chan (2010), mark added by author

On the one hand, street vendors are attracted by the opportunity of development in the city. On the other hand, they are bound to their rural origin by the rigid hukou system. Excluded from the urban-based rights to housing, education and health care, the income of street vending is only enough to maintain the livelihood of vendors themselves but not enough to support their family to live in the city. The translocal lives of street vendors are thus produced by the tension between free labour mobility under neoliberal reform and the static rural-urban division handed down from the Socialist era. Pulled by the two forces, vendors’ family lives are generally characterised by a ‘separated family mode’ (Tan, 2011, p. 145) in which vendors live separately from their parents and possibly kids and wife (for male vendors). It is through this translocal migration that millions of street vendors manage to stay in the cities.

Furthermore, through translocal migration, migrants also ‘construct, rework and transform’ the receiving urban space (Brickell & Datta, 2011, p. 17). As represented in this chapter, the vendors in Guangzhou congregate around Tianhe CBD every day in

<sup>50</sup> ‘Floating’ (*liu dong*) has certain negative connotation in Chinese, somewhat associated to vagabonds (*liu lang han*). A similar stigma attached to mobile populations is found in English as well (see Cresswell, 2010).

<sup>51</sup> According to China Floating Population Report 2016.

the hope of making a living by selling goods to passers-by. Although it is not their initial intention, their daily corporeal practices have contributed to the emergence of new informal spaces within the existing urban fabric. By appropriating street spaces, they have created places for passers-by to look at, to trade, to eat, which may initiate further social interactions. In this way, their business has altered the officially planned function of space in a bottom-up manner. This informal type of space production is especially typical for megacities like Guangzhou which receives large numbers of migrants across dispersed places and in turn is constantly transformed by their translocal migration.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

This thesis attempts to make two contributions to existing academic knowledge: situating revanchist urbanism in Chinese context and understanding street vending as translocal urbanism. This chapter first concludes the two arguments respectively in 7.1 and 7.2, and then elaborates on my attitude to street vending and offers practical policy suggestions.

### 7.1 Mismatch between traditional and modern urban life

Street vending in China is an issue that involves economy, history, culture, social equality and urban landscape. While it contributes to China's rapid urbanisation as an informal component, it also raises contestation over urban space. As Cross and Morales (2007) note, '[u]ltimately, the problem with vendors is ... over the very definition of "appropriate use" of space (p. 20).' To fully understand what this 'appropriateness' is and how it took shape in history, this thesis encourages to view the ongoing politics of street vending not as an isolated, recent incident, but with reference to its earlier histories and surrounding sociocultural context. In sight of the remarkable parallels between modern-day revanchism and the early-modern one, this thesis sees the former as a continuation of the latter, rather than merely a product of neoliberal urban development. The question to be asked, then, is: what are the historical continuities between the present and the early modern era that the parallels are based on? Furthermore, what are the historical discontinuities between the early modern era and the imperial era that led to the marginalisation of street vending? To answer these questions, the thesis breaks down the intermingled aspects of street vending politics into five dimensions: economy, urban planning, urban sanitation, public order and urban administration, and compares them across three historical moments (Figure 7.1).

	Imperial	Early Modern	Contemporary
<b>Economy</b>	'Informal' Street Economy	Modern Consumption Modes	Neoliberal Urban Strategy Formal Economy
<b>Urban Planning</b>	Unplanned Street Network Street as Regular Market	Modern Road Construction	Modernist Urban planning
<b>Urban Sanitation</b>	Not Problematised	Growing Attention On Appearance	National Sanitary City
<b>Public Order</b>	Based on Personal Relationships	Growing Attention On Public Order	National Civilised City
<b>Urban Administration</b>	Retrenchment of Government Control	Modern Police System	Chengguan Administration

Figure 7.1 The historical process of street vendors' marginalisation

*Economy:* Street vendors in imperial China after Song performed spontaneous street

trading which, seeing from today, were informal economies: self-employed, unregistered and untaxed. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the street vending culture were significantly overshadowed by the modern business models such as formal food markets and department stores. Today, along with the competition with the formal economy, street vending is also problematised by the local governments' neoliberal urban development strategies that seek to remove undesirable people and create attractive urban space.

*Urban planning:* Imperial Chinese cities since Song dynasty were characterised by the unplanned, dense web of city streets and alleys, which served as the regular markets and the main civic space for urban residents. This urban fabric was greatly transformed by the construction of modern roads in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which replaced streets, the traditional public space, by roads that served primarily for traffic function, and thus endangered the space of street vending. Contemporary modernist planning carries on the car-oriented approach, and is restructuring traditional urban fabric to an even greater extent by creating spectacular, monumental landscapes.

*Urban sanitation:* Late imperial Chinese urban governance attached few attentions on sanitation. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the discourses of *weisheng* (sanitation) and *shirong* (city appearance) emerged under the comparison with Western cities and aroused Chinese governors' attention on urban environment. Under the new environmental order, street vendors were deemed as source of dirtiness and untidiness, and hence faced government's eviction. The discourses of *weisheng* and *shirong* were re-invoked in post-reform China and played a role in justifying the eviction of street vendors for sanitary and aesthetic reasons, especially through the 'National Sanitary City' campaign.

*Public order:* Imperial Chinese society was organised by personal relations and lacked the consciousness of a public order. The discourse of *wenming* (civilisation/civilised) that emerged at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in a growing awareness of public order in Chinese society. Street vending was accused as 'uncivilised' and faced police's regulation because it disturbed public order, especially the modern sanitary and traffic order. The *wenming* discourse was re-invoked in post-reform political propaganda, especially in the national campaign of 'National Civilised City', which involves massive evictions of street vendors.

*Urban administration:* Imperial China after Song comprehensively retrenched control in

local affairs, thus allowing an autonomous street life. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the modern state of China sought to regain the control of the social life. The establishment of police system enabled government to reach its power into streets and households to discipline commoners' behaviours. It was by such extensive power of police that the government was able to practically ban street vending. Similar to early modern police, the chengguan system established in the 1990s also carry out comprehensive enforcement of various urban affairs, including the regulation of street vending.

These five dimensions help us to grasp the changing circumstances of street vending across 3 different periods. The revanchist urbanism approach is included in the economic dimension of the analytic framework, but a more complete and situated theorisation of China's street vending politics is offered by taking into consideration the five dimensions across three historical stages in China's modernisation process. As shown in the figure, the traditional Chinese urbanism was in conflict with modern urbanism in the five dimensions, and all these dimensions have been inherited in today's revanchist urbanism through new forms. Hence, the thesis concludes that it is the mismatch between traditional and modern urban life that leads to street vending's marginalisation from a long-standing urban tradition to a public nuisance in the modern city.

Here, 'modern' is a central term in our discussion. However, the extensive use of this term in academia has given rise to certain ambiguity and misunderstanding. Classical sociological theories have revealed that the late-19<sup>th</sup>-century Western society was radically different from the past in various aspects, such as Émile Durkheim's notion of division of labour, Ferdinand Tönnies' notion of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, or Louis Wirth's notion of urbanism as a way of life. However, in recent decades, these classical formulations of the contradictory tradition-modernity relationship have been challenged by scholars (Gusfield, 1967). In postcolonial studies and comparative studies, scholars have been seeking to decouple modernity from the West by advocating 'plural' (Bonnett, 2005), 'alternative' (Gaonkar, 2001), 'coeval' (Harootunian, 2000) or 'multiple' (Eisenstadt, 2002) modernities, which explore the different possibilities of non-Western countries and their distinct pathways towards their own forms of modernity. Since the term 'modern' has been imbued with complicated implications in academia, here I shall clarify my use of the term.

Undeniably, China in the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was deeply transformed or ‘impacted’ (Teng & Fairbank, 1979/1954) by Western modernity in various aspects, from ideas to institution to way of life. My use of ‘modern’ mostly refers to certain aspects of this Western-centric modernity. Correspondently, my use of ‘traditional’ refers to state prior to this modern transformation. For example, by saying ‘street vending is traditional’, I mean that street vending was rooted in the urban morphology, economic ecology, sanitary concept, public order concept and urban administration in imperial Chinese cities; by saying ‘street vending is marginalised in modern urban life’, I mean that the occupation is out of place in modern urban planning, formal economy, pursuit of cleanness, stress on public order, and urban administration. Thus, a rough demarcation can be drawn between the traditional China and the modern(ising) China. It is noteworthy that, instead of implying a mutual exclusiveness between the two forms of society or a linear development between them, the concepts of tradition and modernity in this thesis are pragmatically employed only as necessary analytical distinctions, rather than substantive entities. Also, my use of ‘modernity’ does not imply that there is only one form of modernity. When speaking in the sense of ‘multiple modernities’, China undoubtedly has its own ‘modernity with Chinese characteristics’, and the persistence of street vending is one of its visible uniqueness.

## **7.2 Street vending as translocal urbanism**

The traditionality of street vending comes not only from the traditional urban life embodied in this occupation, but also from the rural origin of the vendors.

In imperial China, cities were not deemed decisively as a better place than the countryside. Rather, the city and the country were integrated in a ‘rural-urban continuum’, and the socio-cultural concept of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ were not sharply distinguished (Skinner & Baker, 1977; Whyte, 2010, p. 29). It was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when China began its modernisation that the continuum was broken and replaced by a prevalent notion of urban superiority. Since modernisation resided primarily in urban areas, cities became the locus of modernity, of elegant lifestyle and dominant culture, while peasantry and rurality were set apart as ‘the past’, the symbol of an old society untouched by modernity (Jacka, 2005, p. 36). In this sense, the temporal difference between tradition and modernity can be translated into a geographical one: the country represents the tradition and the city represents modernity. This urban-rural divide is a key characteristic of contemporary China. The urban and rural China have been described as ‘two societies in one country’ (Whyte, 2010) in

regard to the stark inequality and sociocultural differences between the two areas.

The long-standing uneven urban-rural development has put a stigma on rural people and rurality. As early as the Republican period (1912-1949), urbanites had been seeing country people as stupid, sick and poor (Fei, 1992/1947, p. 45). This late-19<sup>th</sup>-century mind set lasts well into today. After the 1978 reform opened the door of free labour mobility, the massive rural-to-urban migration stirred up certain discontent among urban dwellers. A perception of 'rural idiocy' went popular. Official policies referred to rural people as 'low *suzhi* (quality)' population (H. Liu, 2008). The media constructed their image as an uncivilised, dangerous 'other' in urban society, and often associated them with urban disorder and crime (Jacka, 2005, p. 31, 47; G. Lei, 2003).

Against this background, vendors' movement from villages to the streets of modern cities becomes an intrusion of rurality/traditionality into the realm of modernity. As Henriot (2012, p. 122) notes, Chinese peddlers 'embodied ways in which the past kept creeping up in everyday life'. On the one hand, many traits of traditional Chinese urban life are reflected in the way street vending is practised, such as the use of streets as public space and regular market, the personal relationship between vendors and customers, and the ceaseless clamour, congestion and chaos it brings. In this sense, street vending is, by its nature, traditional. On the other hand, since the vendors in today's Chinese cities are mostly from rural origins, the rural *habitus* they carry lack the modern consciousness of sanitation, public order and city appearance (see 5.4.3). I have argued in 6.5.5 that vendors in Guangzhou live a 'translocal life'. As translocality bridges the origin space and receiving space, vendors' deep translocal connections with rural culture necessarily intensify the interactions and sometimes the conflicts between them. The intrusiveness of street vending is an inevitable outcome of vendors' translocal lives, because through their daily trading practices, vendors bring both the traditionality of their occupation and the rurality of themselves into the streets of modern cities. Borrowing Michael Smith's notion on 'transnational urbanism' (Smith, 2001, p. 70), street vending can be viewed as a *translocal* urbanism, since it is the product of China's massive translocal migration. Translocal urbanism is intrinsically transgressive, because they inevitably bring migrants' 'personal relations and networks, trajectories, idiosyncrasies, identities, imaginaries, and resulting practices' (Bork-Hüffer et al., 2016) from origin space to receiving spaces. Such translocal transgression between rural *habitus* and urban orders is the source of the politics of street vending (see Figure 7.2). For a megacity like Guangzhou where heterogeneous population converge from all over

the country, such transgressive spatial practises and the resultant politics are constantly ongoing.

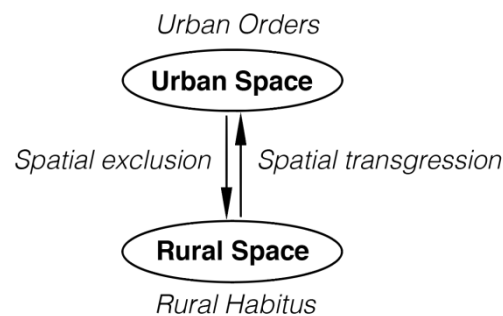


Figure 7.2 The dynamics of translocal urbanism

Concomitantly, the translocal urbanism of street vending is also a force that reshapes urban landscape. The outcome is what we shall call ‘translocal landscapes’. Generally, translocal landscapes are defined as spaces of ‘here’ shaped by ‘parts of elsewhere’ (Kinder, 2016, p. 899). The landscape of street vending is characterised by the hybrid of traditional norms, rural habitus and modern physical environment. Through the daily business of street vendors, the landscape of traditional Asian cities, the ceaseless clamour, congestion and chaos, is summoned back again and again in today’s modern Chinese cities. Translocal landscapes are typically filled with anxieties and confusions, because of the manifold dislocations they encompass – dislocations of ‘primitive agrarian mentality’ being planted into an ‘urban-ordered mentality’ (Lukito, 2015, p. 25), lower-class migrant workers trespassing on middle-class territory (Fernandes, 2006, p. xii), and informal activities intruding into formal economy system. In China’s ‘transitional cities’ (Wu, 2003) where old concepts and norms coexist with new values and social orders, such translocal landscapes and their accompanying confusions and anxieties are commonly seen and probably unavoidable. The incongruous existence of street vendors constantly undermines the officially designed modern and spectacular landscapes, and thus gives rise to never-ending urban politics (see Figure 7.3).

The vendors are so visible that have to an extent reshaped the Chinese urban landscape.





Figure 7.3 Translocal landscapes. Left: a vendor in an underground shopping mall. Right: Outdoor barbeque under Canton Tower, the new landmark of Guangzhou.

### 7.3 Street vending and vibrancy of city

The case of street vending leads us to examine the quality of China's urban space. In a centralised country where life is under the state's powerful control and pervasive surveillance, space for spontaneous civic life is limited: public gathering of any sort is closely monitored; rallies and demonstrations are allowed only when approved by the authorities; free speech is under strict censorship in both urban space and cyberspace; activities associated with 'civil society' are marked out as dangerous attempts to dismantle the ruling party's social foundation<sup>52</sup>. Behind the prosperity of China's urban economy, its urban landscape is dominated by hollow political propaganda and commercial advertisements, leaving few spaces for personal expression and public social life. However, some scholars have argued against such pessimistic view and tried to prove that, even amid the colonisation of everyday life by capitalist logics and political repression, there are still micro-level public spaces mushrooming in Chinese cities. They are created by activities such as dancing, singing, Tai chi and Kung fu practising, as well as street vending. Although not officially planned, these spaces are practised as the everyday public realms of urban dwellers in a bottom-up manner (Hou, 2010, pp. 21-35; Orum et al., 2009; Qian, 2014).

Different from other public activities, street vending is deeply involved in the whole urban economic ecology. As Chapter 6 shows, vendors' businesses have become integral to the whole consumption landscape in Tianhe CBD. Visitors come not only for the

<sup>52</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Document\\_Number\\_Nine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Document_Number_Nine)

shopping malls and restaurants, but also for the street food and other merchandise sold by vendors (for example, the calligraphy brushes and papers are not sold in any nearby stores and malls). Moreover, despite the official view that street vendors disturb urban order, they actually actively join the order of the district by forming its own repetitive temporal and spatial patterns (see 6.2) that are complementary to the surrounding formal economies <sup>53</sup>. That is to say, there may exist an order behind the seemingly chaotic vending activities, but it is ordered deeply by how it functions rather than how it looks. James Scott (1998) raises a comparison between visual order and functional order drawing on the examples of Jane Jacobs and Le Corbusier. In the 1960s, Jacobs pointed out that visual order had become the main criteria of government's assessment of urban environment in North American cities (Jacobs, 2016, p. 372). The 'order' that the American municipalities attempted to achieve was more emphasised on its visual appearance rather than its practical and functional aspect. In contrary, Le Corbusier adopted a visual understanding of order and imposed pure Cartesian forms on his urban planning, believing the geometric clarity, simplicity, centrality and immense size of urban architecture necessarily brings improvement on human wellbeing (Scott, 1998, p. 114). For Jacobs, in contrast, 'there is no necessary correspondence between the tidy look of geometric order on one hand and systems that effectively meet daily needs on the other.' She criticises planners' prevalent trend 'to infer functional order from... purely visual order (Scott, 1998, p. 133).'

Through her deep observation of street life, Jacobs found that it is those streets with chaotic appearance that are most vibrant, safe and liveable. Behind the seemingly lack of visual order, there is an informal order that 'is kept by an intricate, almost unconscious network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves (Jacobs, 2016, p. 31).' Such order is embedded in the logic of everyday practice, and cannot be institutionally enforced (Jacobs, 2016, p. 56). Therefore, Jacobs advocates a diverse and mixed uses of street (Jacobs, 2016, p. 152), and proposes to stimulate the crossed use of streets by supporting street vending (Jacobs, 2016, p. 396), because it can liven up atmosphere, promote social interactions and maintain public security in the form of 'eyes on the street'. Jacobs' propositions were later inherited by the New Urbanism movement, whose planning practices feature mixed-use, walkable neighbourhoods and the building of a sense of community. Although these concepts do not impact much on China's urban planning, the street vendors are actually practising them through their daily business. For example, in Figure

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<sup>53</sup> Other research also find that informality forms its own order without a top-down plan (Kaul, 2011).

7.4, the vendors have turned the underground station into a small market, and made use of a bus station to sell dried lotus pods (for home decoration). These creatively improvised uses of space echo the ‘DIY urbanism’ in recent years (Finn, 2014, G. Douglas, 2014).



*Figure 24 Street vendors' appropriation of urban space (shot respectively in Guangzhou and Beijing)*

As Y. Jabareen (2014, p. 414) points out, DIY urbanism is a specific mode of ‘informal space production’ associated with urban informal sectors, appearing both in the global North and South. These unauthorised spontaneous alterations of urban space ‘question the very formality of the city’ and rethink urban built environment as open to popular reinterpretation (G. Douglas, 2013). Through the daily operation of business, street vendors are rewriting the official spatial order in a micro, guerrilla-like manner, resisting the process of capitalist/statist rationalisation (Cross, 2007, p. 26) and remaking the homogeneous politics- and capital-dominated urban landscape into spaces of difference. They fill the void left by the urban planning and capitalist system by appropriating street spaces and providing goods and services that the formal sector may fail to reach. More radically, John Cross (2007, p. 7) suggests that street vending is a postmodern phenomenon that loosens the modernist system in terms of distribution

order (by competing against modern retail outlet), production order (by offering alternative livelihood outside factory and office) and visual order (by appropriating public space). Contrary to the modernist approach, postmodern urbanism views the continued existence of street vending activities as a positive reaction to restrictive planning and a vibrant and steadily rising sector that is complementary to the formal sector (Tripp, 1997).

Moreover, street vending adds human factors to urban space. As Cross (2007, p. 9) notes, informality is 'a particular way in which people interact'. While formal shopping malls involve formal interactions, street vendors interact with clients in an informal, personal way. Urban planners have criticised modernist planning for over-organising urban life and making it inhuman and alienated (Sennett, 1970, 1990; Lefebvre, 1991). The unattractive 'hard edges' (Gehl, 2013, p. 79) of street-side façade discourage random social encounters, and lead to boring, tiring and isolated walking experience for pedestrians. The mono-functional planning divides urban space into islands that only invite certain groups of people, thus causing social segregation and exclusion (Rio, 2004). In such urban setting, the unplanned intrusion of vendors multiplies the use of space, and thus enlivens the lifelessness caused by mono-functional zoning. They play a role in 'softening' the street facades by encouraging passers-by to linger, watch and interact, and by doing so create numerous microscopic urban locales where diverse people can mingle with each other.

Modernist planning is also criticised for its car-oriented approach that undermines the potential for integrated neighbourhoods and the cultivation of local social capital (Barton, 2005; Leyden, 2003). In contrary, street vending fosters pedestrian culture and contributes to the formation of walkable neighbourhoods. Most vendors in residential areas are closely involved in local communal life. Often, they are acquainted with local residents and have become their daily source of food supply (see Figure 7.5).



Figure 25 Street vendors in Mianhua Hutong, a residential area in Beijing

Given the discussions above, I support a more flexible and benign way of regulation on street vendors. Certain scale of street vending could provide a positive complement to the official high-modernist aesthetics and functional zoning system, because it makes the streets more liveable and more public. Moreover, vending and other informal economic activities have been, in many cases, an important means for the massive urban migrants to survive in the face of China's state political economy. Here I am not advocating an anarchic stance. Of course, there are problems that need to be regulated by the government, especially in terms of food safety, sanitation and traffic order – after all, modernity is a *fait accompli*, hence our discussion has to be based on the modern urban built environment and modern concepts of sanitation and city appearance. But lessons can be learned from the Song Chinese cities that a vibrant civic life is often at the cost of superficial disorder, and certain retrenchment of bureaucratic control from street life can yield an organic order, one that develops spontaneously from the bottom up, rather than imposed by a top-down, one-off plan. Similarly, Cross (2007, p. 11) has suggested a postmodern spirit of experimentation in multi-layer administration that creates ways in which distinct systems can intersect while existing side-by-side – while maintaining the modern formal system, allows spaces for those complementary informal activities to grow. Whether premodern or postmodern, the point is that true vibrancy is never planned, but planted like a seed and grows by itself. We have seen in 6.2 that certain benevolence of government's street vending management has left living spaces for vendors in Tianhe CBD and created a symbiotic biology between street vending and the large shopping malls.

How, then, to maintain urban order without killing the vibrancy brought out by street vending in practical urban administration? I would like to offer some suggestions based



on the findings in the thesis.

The essential reason why current urban policies fail to foster urban vibrancy is that an ordered, clean, modern cityscape is much more visible as a political achievement, which benefits local leaders' political careers (see 5.3.2). Therefore, my first suggestion would be that local leaders should change their promotion-driven mindset and try to understand how the city could benefit from spontaneous street vending activities. Based on such recognition, a more supportive policy environment for street vending should be established. To achieve that, the policymaking process should listen to the voice of vendors and consider their needs. After all, street vending serves as an importance source of livelihood for many rural-to-urban migrants. As long as traffic is not blocked, and environment is not contaminated, street vendors should be allowed to enter public space to earn their livelihood. Currently, Guangzhou government has designated zones that allow street vendors to conduct business. However, this measure has not been welcomed by vendors, because these zones are all located in peripheral areas, which makes vendors difficult to find customers; additionally, the government charges a certain amount of licence fee every month on vendors. As a result, most vendors still head to commercial centres or residential areas for more considerable profit. Imposing spatial planning on street vending is understandable, but the government should move the street vending zones to more popular areas and stop charging license fees. Only in this way can the policy really change street vendors' choices. On the other hand, individual itinerant street vending can also be allowed, but the regulation can state clearly that the vendor must keep the area clean, avoid blocking traffic, avoid producing smoke, accept hygienic inspections, etc. as conditions. In this way, the burden of urban administration can be shifted to the vendors themselves.

For now, a stable administrative solution of street vending has not come out, and the regulatory practices have been swinging between rigour and benevolence. Although the general trend shows a post-revanchist softening of the previous hardline anti-street-vending approach, the future direction is rather vague. Negative cases still appear from time to time. In 2017, as 'part of a broader plan to modernize, beautify and gentrify the Chinese capital', the Beijing government set forth a policy of 'relocating non-capital functions' and 'transferring low-end business and population', which has led to massive evictions of tens of thousands of migrant workers within a short time. This included street vendors as well, for street vending is a typical 'low-end business' (Denyer & Lin, 2017). Just before I submitted the thesis, I heard that the Guangzhou Chengguan Bureau has tightened its regulation and there are hardly any vendors in Tianhe CBD

any more. I am not sure if the vendors I used to work with will return in the future. If disappearance is the fate of street vending in modern China, then this thesis is an elegy for the lost tradition.

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